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ULTIMATE MODEL GUIDE

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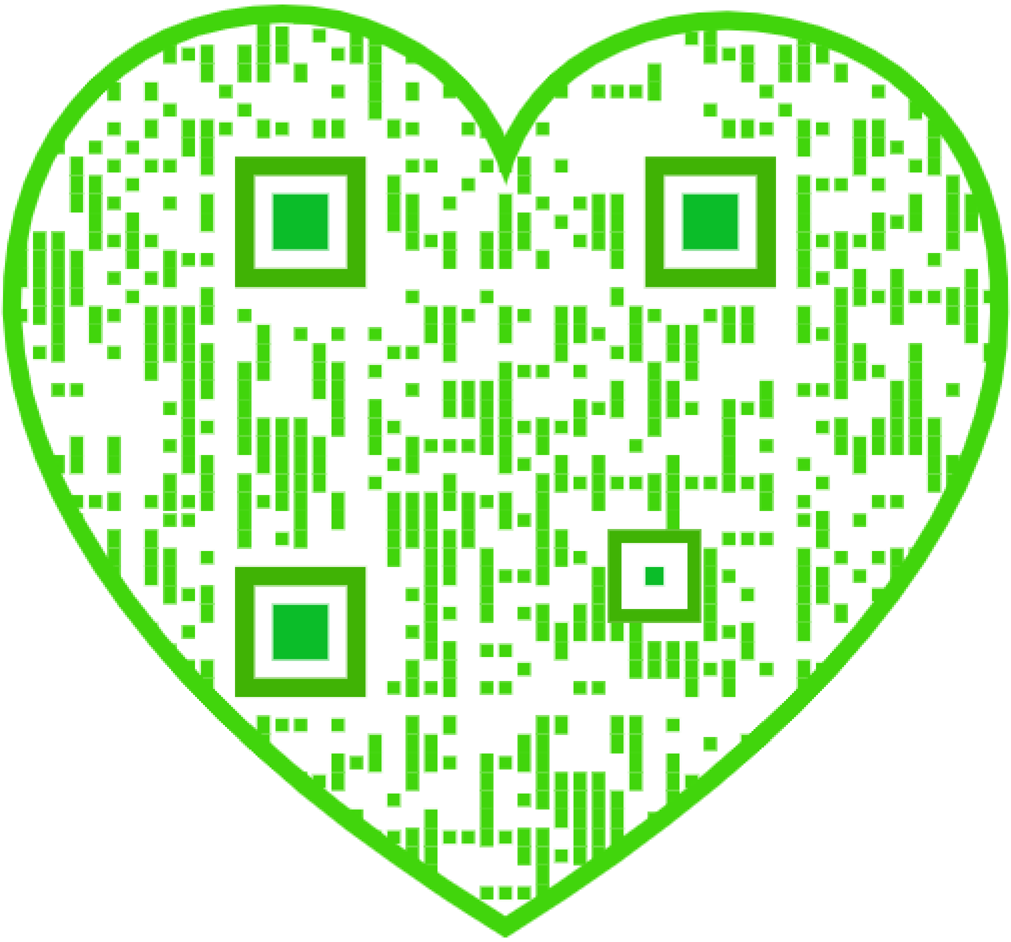

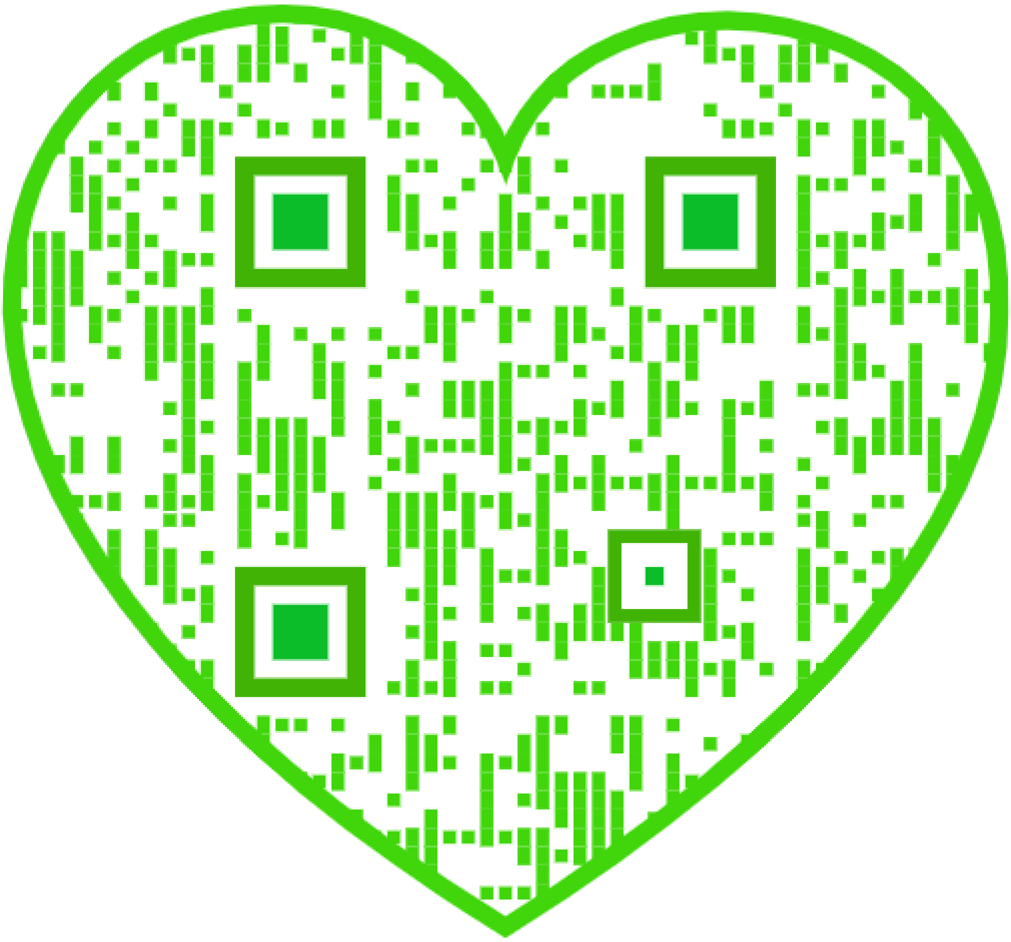

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A celebration of Bentley

Any motor manufacturer established for over a century is sure to have its own fascinating story, but few automotive tales are as impressive as that of Bentley Motors. The company that started building cars in 1919 is still going strong, producing them at the same plant it has occupied since just after World War Two. This is a marque with real history.

The ingenuity and determination of Walter Owen Bentley – better known as W.O. – saw his fledgling brand achieve great things in the 1920s, winning at Le Mans as well as winning over many of the world's wealthiest car buyers. By early the following decade, however, affected by the Great Depression and unable to pay its way, Bentley went into administration. It was subsequently rescued by Rolls-Royce, and remained the sister brand of that most prestigious of manufacturers for the next seven decades.

It hasn't all been plain sailing, of course, with further ups and downs along the way. By the late 1970s, there was talk of discontinuing Bentley production altogether, given how few were being produced each year by then and how overshadowed by Rolls-Royce the brand had become. Fortunately, though, Crewe management chose instead to reinvent Bentley as a performance marque, with models like the Turbo R of 1985-on helping to dramatically boost sales.

New generations of high-performance saloons and coupés appeared, giving Bentley a higher profile and putting it back at the forefront of luxury performance. By the end of the 20th century, the company had a brand new owner and these days it's a marque that remains highly revered, producing some of the most sought after cars in its sector.

In this 132-page publication, we chart the full history of Bentley and take a look at its future plans, as well as offering buying advice for an array of desirable post-war classics. We take an in-depth look at the most popular models, and we meet the owners of some stunning examples.

Finally, just a gentle reminder that if you're not yet a subscriber to our bi-monthly sister title, *Rolls-Royce & Bentley Driver*, here's the link to find out more: **https://shop.kelsey.co.uk/rrb**

Paul Guinness
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THE START OF IT ALL

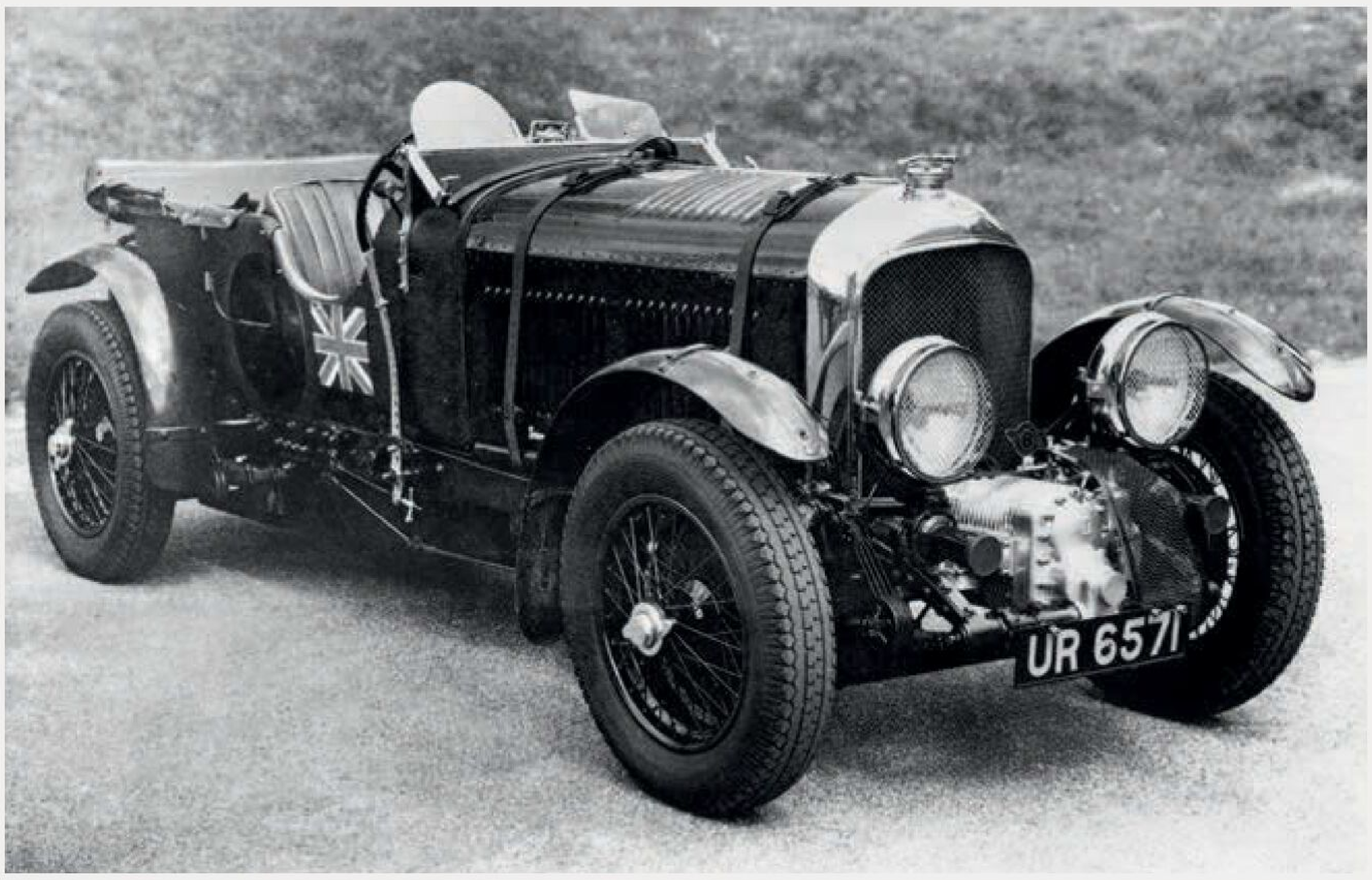
It began with the roar of a testbed engine and ended with the shuffle of receivers' feet. We take a look at Bentley's early years of 1919-31, and the cars and characters that shaped the company

Determined to make a name for himself at the top of Britain's post-war car manufacturing movement, Walter Owen Bentley had one main ambition in 1919: "To build a good car, a fast car". And into the melting pot to create the original 3 Litre went many valuable ingredients, including W.O.'s premium apprenticeship in locomotive engineering, his racetrack exploits on two and four wheels, and a thorough appreciation of the pre-1914 high-efficiency continental Grand Prix engine. Then there was his involvement in the French DFP (Doriot, Flandrin et Parent) 12/15 2 Litre car, both through the London sales agency he'd conducted with his brother 'H.M.' (Horace Milner Bentley) and at Brooklands, where W.O.'s pioneering high-compression aluminium pistons turned the DFP into a Brooklands record-breaker.

In fact, those pistons were to be his contribution to the First World War effort. Serving as a lieutenant in the Royal Naval Air Service's technical department, he sold the idea to aero engine manufacturers such as Rolls-Royce and Sunbeam, and collaborated with Frank Burgess at Humber to adapt the French Clerget rotary aero engine, on which they redesigned everything except the valve gear.

W.O. Bentley, the engineer and entrepreneur who created his namesake company in 1919.

Armed with such credentials, Bentley knew exactly what he wanted for his first car. Employing the best of pre-war continental racing practice, it was to have a four-cylinder overhead-cam engine of three litres, with a crossflow head, four valves per cylinder, pent-roof combustion chambers and the celebrated aluminium pistons. Advanced, certainly. But above all, it had to be a reliable unit for long-distance running, requiring minimum maintenance. Much »



The supercharged 4½ Litre Bentley – the legendary machine best known by its 'Blower' nickname.

of the credit for actually committing this design to paper was due to expert draughtsman Frank Burgess, whom Bentley lured away from what Frank called a "damned good job [at Humber] to join this outfit".

"Over in the USA, a 3 Litre mixing with home-side Duesenbergs managed 13th place in the 1922 Indianapolis 500"

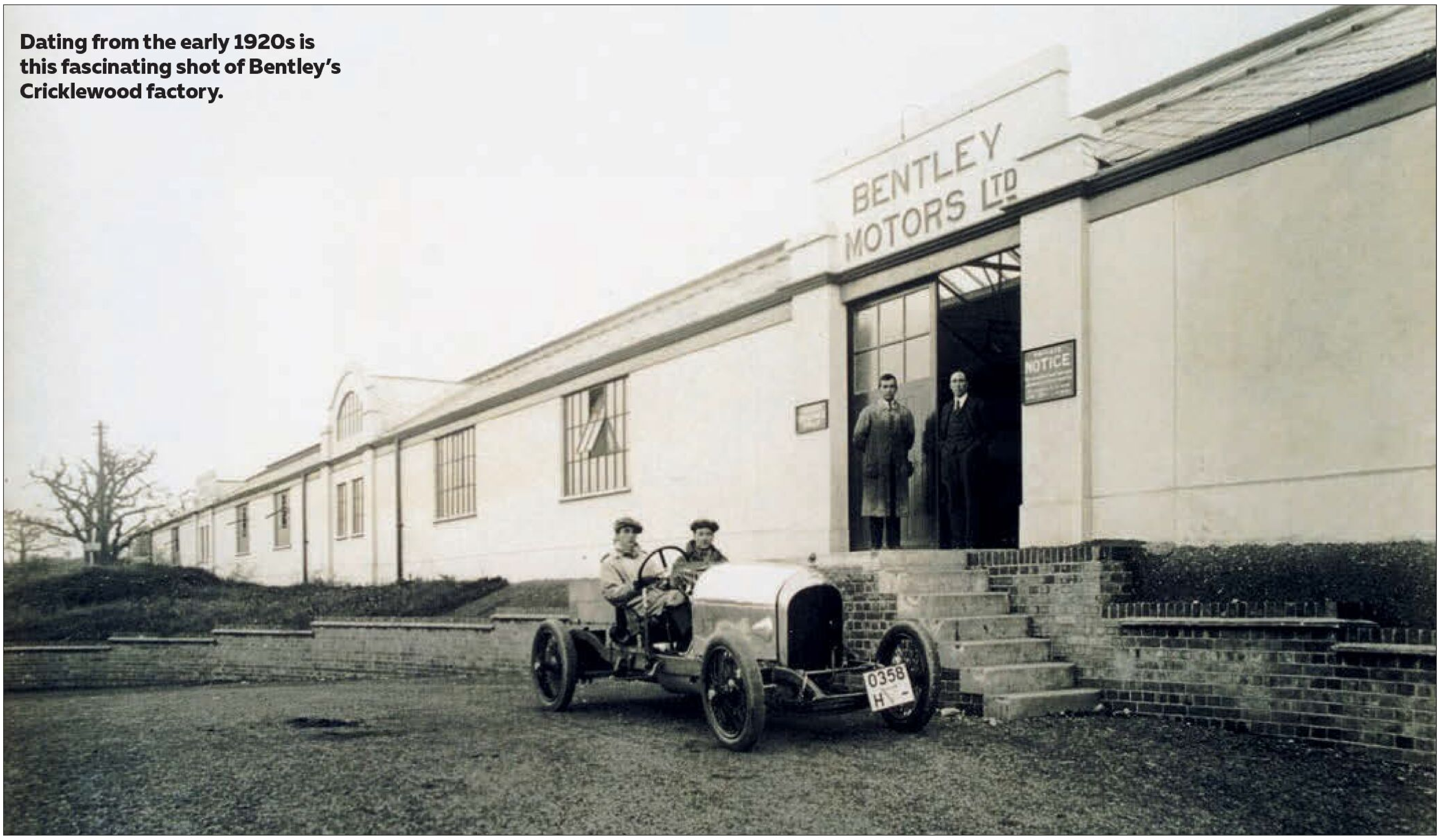
SPEEDY ANIMAL

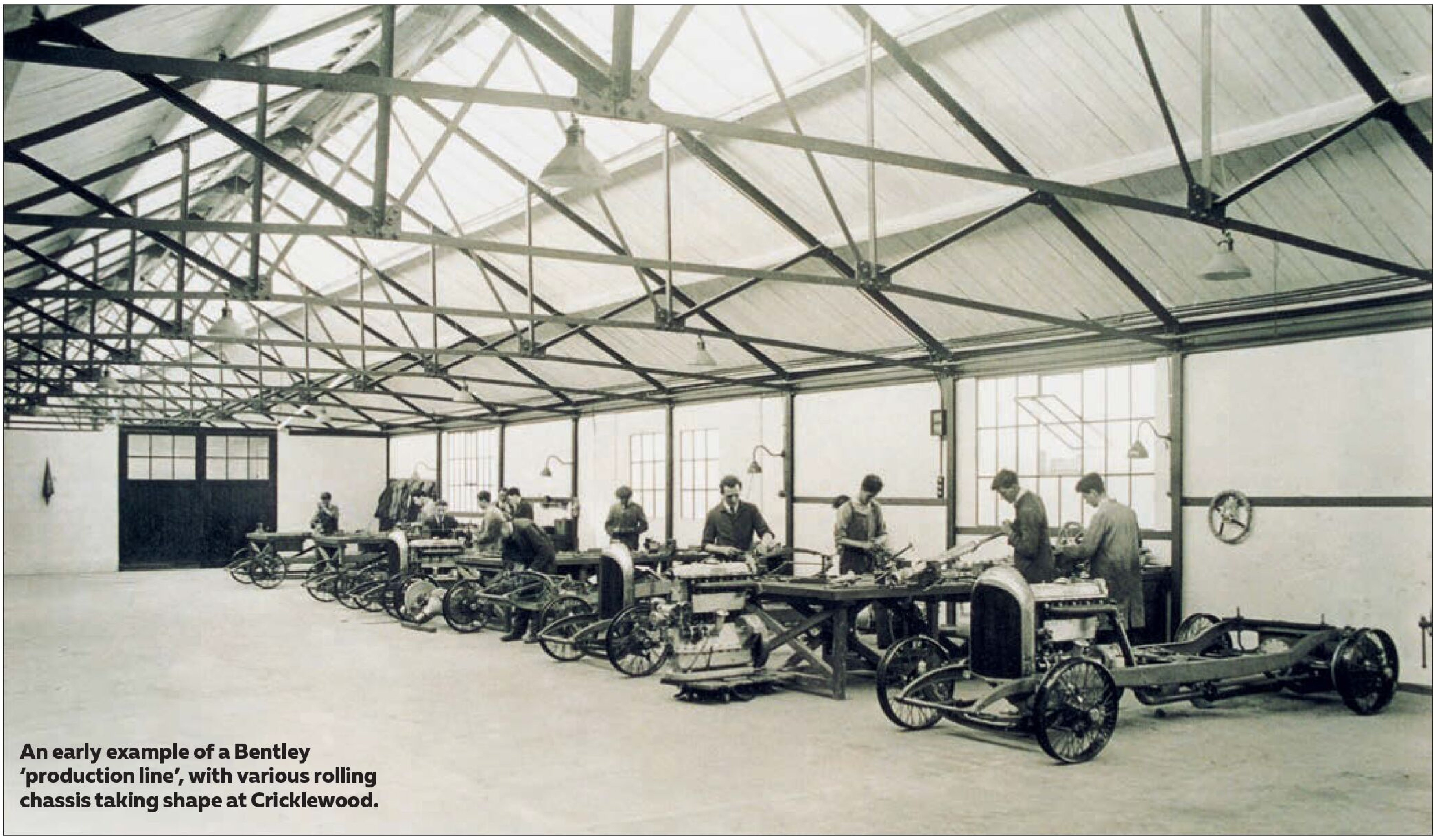
Although raising funds for production delayed the car's launch until September 1921, the original and only car available for demonstrations at the time – EXP ('Experimental Chassis') 1 – was road-tested by Sammy Davis of *The Autocar* in January 1920. He wrote: "As the speed increased to 70mph the landscape leapt at us, wind shrieked past the screen… there comes the irresistible urge to burst into some wild war song… but still the silver radiator rushes towards that dark unattainable line of the horizon… done with the air of a lithe, active, speedy animal straining a little on the leash."

Such heady talk certainly had the bright young things of the 1920s straining at the leash, as famed motoring writer L.J.K. Setright later pointed out: "The early 3 Litre Bentley, before it was detuned and castrated for the carriage trade, could be had with gearbox ratios of 1:1, 1.3:1, 1.6:1 and 2.6:1, and Bentley's salesmen used to astonish potential customers by driving it at a steady 60mph while slipping freely from one gear to another of the uppermost three. Most drivers in the 1920s had never done 60mph at all, let alone in second gear!" Early customers prepared to part with a chassis price of £1050, including Prideaux Brune, Arbuthnot Brisco, Major R.H. Sheepshanks, Madame Dracopoli, Sir Frederick Freake and Prince George (Duke of Kent), must have been thrilled by such unprecedented performance.

The 3 Litre soon made its mark in competition. Over in the USA, an example mixing with home-side Duesenbergs managed 13th place in the May 1922 Indianapolis 500, followed a month later by three cars (with W.O. among the drivers) taking the team prize in the Tourist Trophy on the Isle of Man. Then in 1924 came the first Le Mans success, with a win for Duff and Clement. Even in 1927, the by-then-outclassed 3 Litre managed another Le Mans win, after Sammy Davis extricated 'Old Number Seven' from a White House Corner pile-up and drove on to victory with a bent chassis.

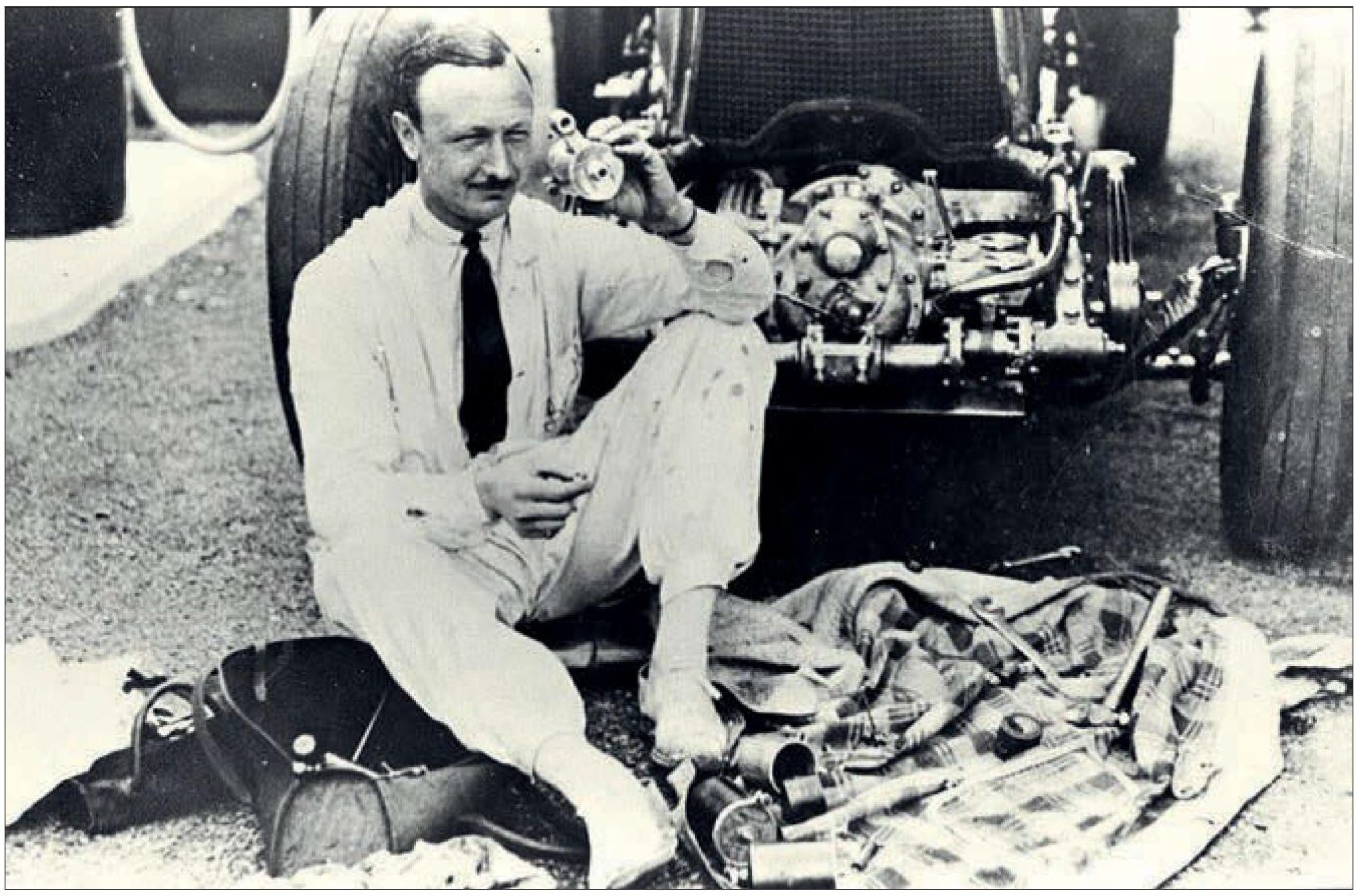
Some 1613 Bentley 3 Litres were built up to 1929, although subtle changes were continually made to satisfy customer demands, reflecting W.O.'s speciality as a development engineer. Four-wheel brakes were added in 1924 and the range included the 80mph 1922-25 Short and 1923-on Long Standard (blue radiator badge), the higher-compression 1922-24 TT Replica and 1924-29 Speed Models (red badge) capable of 90mph, and the 1925-27 Super Sports – recognisable by its Green Label radiator tapering in at the bottom,


Dating from the early 1920s is this fascinating shot of Bentley's Cricklewood factory.



An early example of a Bentley 'production line', with various rolling chassis taking shape at Cricklewood.

and good for up to the 'ton' on 88bhp. The Long Standard chassis however, with its 10ft 10in wheelbase, reflected the inexorable demands of statelier customers for heavier and more formal bodywork. Allowances had to be made for such cars to take a maximum weight of 35cwt (1778kg), and naturally this blunted the performance. Bentley was therefore aware as early as 1924 that the carriage trade needed a more suitable model.



Sir Henry 'Tim' Birkin was the visionary behind the supercharged version of the 4½ Litre.

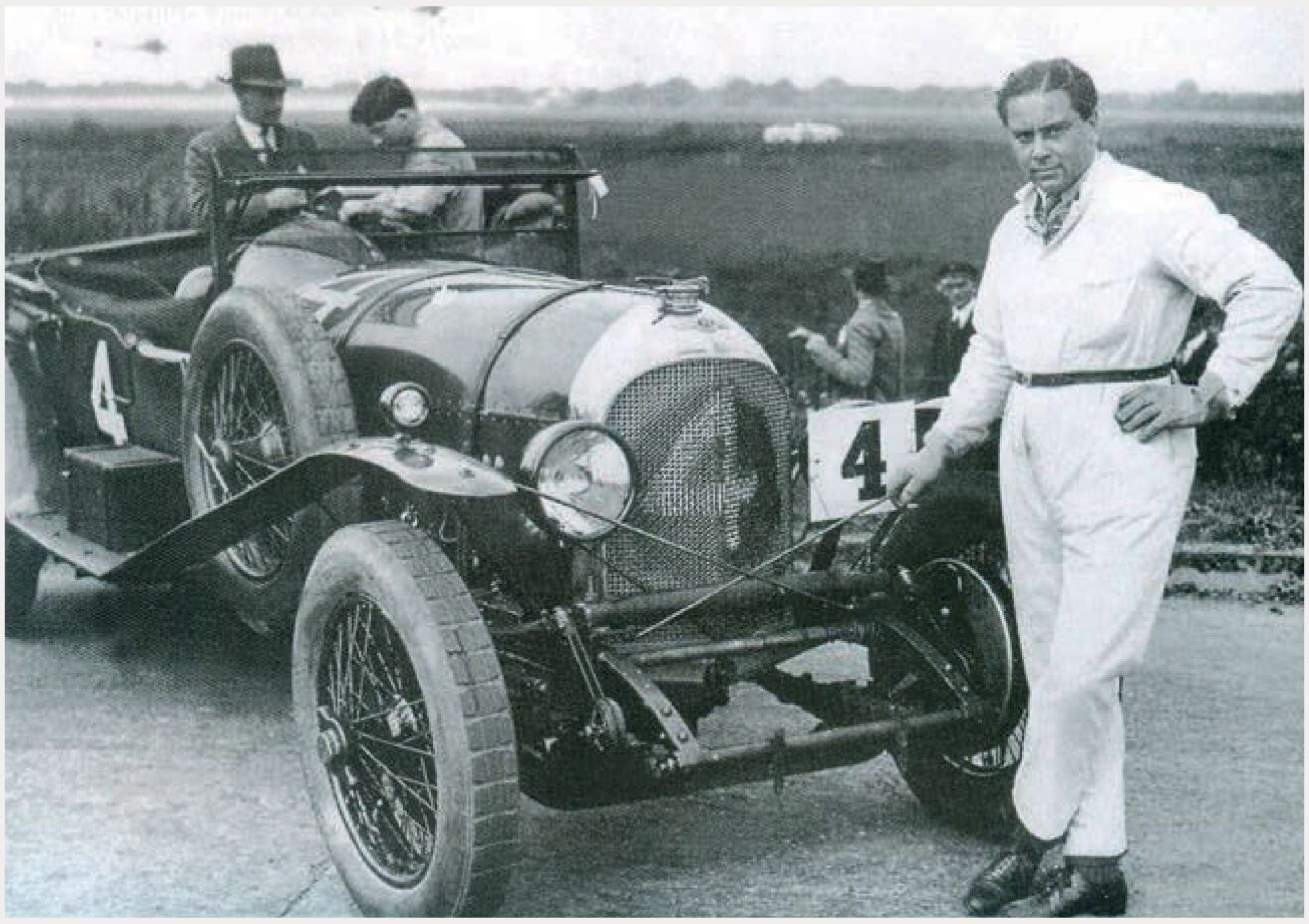
FLEXIBLE FINESSE

The answer was the 6½ Litre, which started life with a six-cylinder 4½-litre engine installed in a Weymann saloon-bodied mock-up – flaunting an anonymous, truck-like radiator – to transport W.O. and Hillstead to the 24 Heures du Mans of 1924. On their way home through France, they chanced upon the prototype Rolls-Royce Phantom undergoing continental trials, with the ensuing friendly dice resolving Bentley to up the ante by two litres.

It was a wise decision. Announced at the 1925 Motor Show with deliveries starting in March of the following year, the six-cylinder 24-valve 147bhp newcomer provided American standards of effortless flexibility, with the ability to stay in top gear as long as possible proving invaluable to many in the era of pre-synchro changes. What was more, the car could manage 75-80mph in relative silence when fitted with large saloon bodywork. The Green Label 3 Litre's style of tapering radiator was standard wear on the original 6½ Litre, but reverted to parallel sides for the Speed Six, introduced in 1928. This version sported a higher compression ratio and twin carburettors instead of the single Smiths, boosting power to 160-180bhp. Depending on its bodywork, » it could reach 90-100mph – and the 200bhp team cars won Le Mans again for Bentley in 1929 and 1930.

To the 6½ Litre's client list of usual suspects (viscounts, baronets, honourables and princes – the Duke of Kent, Imeritinski of Russia and the Nawab of Bhopal among them) were numerous celebrities of the day from the world of showbusiness. Ambrose the bandleader, who once gambled away the band's wages on the tables at Cannes, owned a 1930 Speed Six by Lancefield, with louvred rocker panels; stage-and-screen actress Tallulah Bankhead had a 1927 Standard Weymann saloon, a car that unfortunately ended up destroyed by fire; and Gertrude Lawrence, performer of Cole Porter's wonderful song *The Physician*, drove a 1928 Gurney Nutting Standard 6½ Litre, taking it with her to engagements in New York with American number plates screwed untidily over its British YV 9345 registration.

Production numbers totalled 362 Standard 6½ Litres and 182 Speed Sixes (the latter being W.O.'s favourite model), although survival rates are sadly low. Depreciation galloped ahead until by 1938 the 6½ Litre bottomed-out in Glass's Guide as scrap value only, when even the Gurney Nutting Speed Six coupé – allegedly used by Barnato to beat the Blue Train from the Côte d'Azure to Calais in 1930 – carried a trade price of only £20! These days, of course, professionally preserved survivors can realise seven figures.

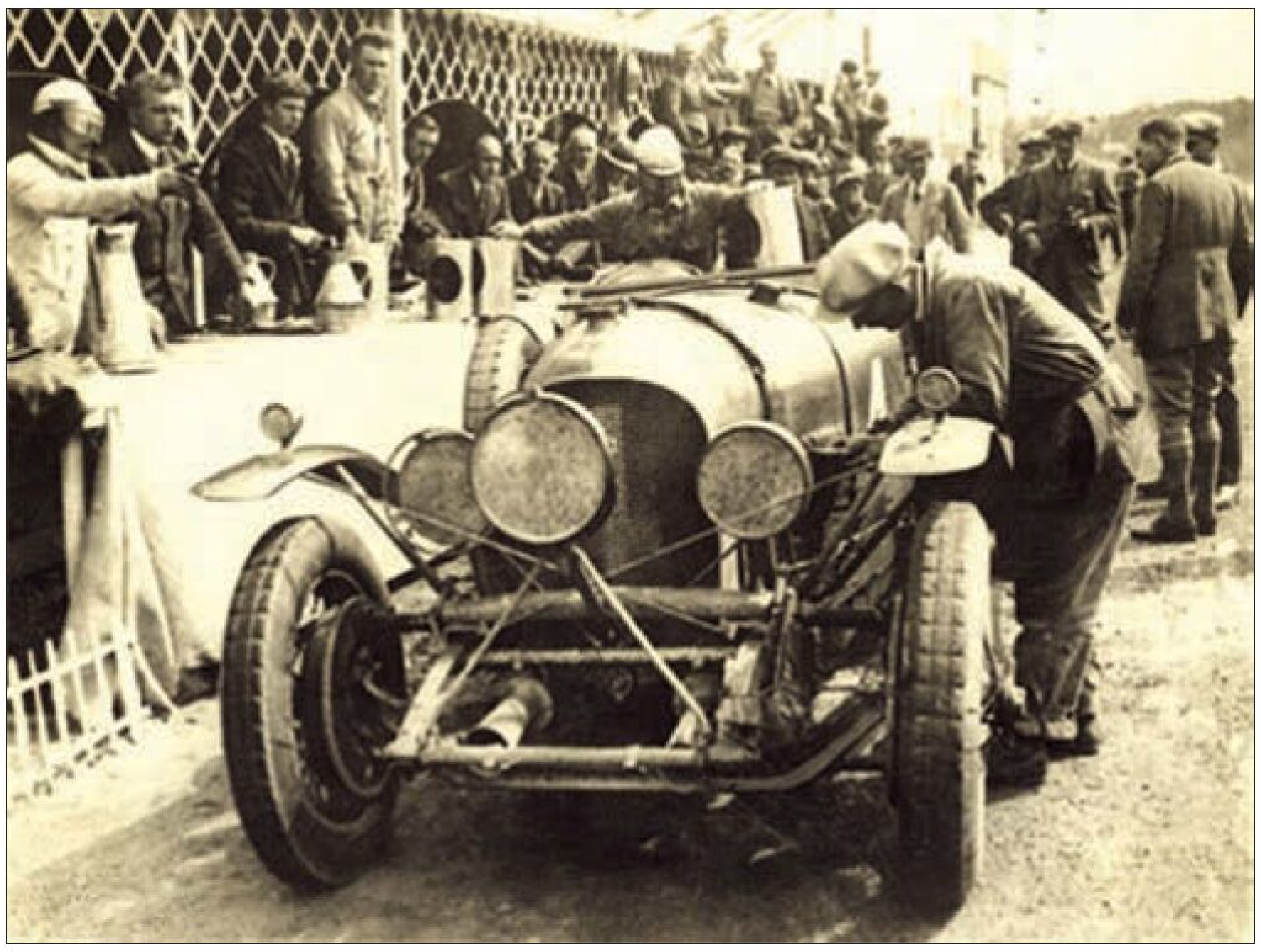


Bentley customer and successful racer Woolf Barnato came to the company's rescue in 1925, albeit on his own terms.

'BLOODY THUMP'

With the carriage trade's needs met and with the 3 Litre at the limit of its development, it was time for Bentley to revisit the enthusiast's pursuit of what early customer and lorry manufacturer J.E. Foden described as "the good old bloody thump", giving rise in 1927 to the four-cylinder 4½ Litre. Powered by what was essentially two-thirds of a 6½ Litre unit as a larger, smoother and more flexible version of the 3 Litre, it proved equally suitable for sporting or luxury use. Performance belied its heavy looks; in standard trim it was capable of 92mph and, according to a 1928 road test, pulled from 10 to 80mph in just 18 seconds and achieved 16mpg. The 4½ was also much more tuneable than the 3 Litre, persuaded in some cases to yield 160bhp over the standard 104 horses.

The 4½ Litre won Le Mans in 1928.



Woolf Barnato and Bernard Rubin were victorious at Le Mans in 1928 at the wheel of Bentley's 4½ Litre.

Shown pushing his 'Blower' to the limit on the banked Brooklands circuit is famed Bentley Boy, Tim Birkin.

> “To the 6½ Litre’s client list of usual suspects were numerous celebrities from the world of show business”

But this was not enough for Sir Henry ‘Tim’ Birkin, the Bentley Boy who wanted to go his own way with a supercharged version from his Welwyn workshops, proceeding to extract 240bhp in the process. However, W.O. disapproved of supercharging, rating it as a perversion of his design and a corruption of its performance. He was vindicated almost immediately when two ‘Blowers’ intended for the 1929 Le Mans didn’t show because of excessive leakage from the main bearings, plunging oil pressure to just 10psi. Birkin then appeared with a ‘blown’ 4½ for the 1929 Six-Hour race, but again lubrication bothers most likely forced retirement. Although one of the ‘Blowers’ re-bodied as a single-seater later broke the Brooklands Outer Circuit record, high placings eluded them in other events and none finished in the 1930 Le Mans.

Despite his objections, however, Bentley had obliged Birkin with the manufacture of 50 4½ Litre ‘Blowers’ for Le Mans homologation purposes – possibly in acknowledgement of their friendship, thus demonstrating his ability to keep business differences apart from personal relationships. Road-spec ‘Blowers’ managed 103mph, but drank with an 11mpg thirst.

PHANTOM BAITER

If, following on from the supercharging issue, we needed any reminding that W.O. subscribed to the no-substitute-for-litres theory, we may look no further than his final masterpiece, the 8 Litre. To quote motoring author Michael Frostick, it was “the straw which broke the camel’s back”. But what a straw…

Aiming for “an exceptional degree of refinement, silence and comfort”, the 8 Litre stood comparison with the majestic Hispano-Suiza, the biggest Mercedes-Benz, and even Bugatti’s Royale. Its mammoth chassis, designed for a lower centre of gravity and equipped with a Tecalemit one-shot lubrication system, could take the largest bodywork, spanned by seven tubular crossmembers to eradicate any of the weaving experienced with the longer 6½ Litre frames. The suspension was massively semi- »

elliptic all round for a smooth ride; and although initially the front springs were shackled at their forward ends, early problems with serious axle tramp soon had the leaves shackled aft.

The twin-SU carburettor, 7983cc engine was a bored-out version of the 6½, with the usual OHC layout, four valves per cylinder and running in eight main bearings. It produced 220bhp on a 5.5 to 1 compression ratio, enough to propel this huge car – 17 or 18ft long depending on a 12 or 13ft wheelbase – at up to 104mph (compared with the Phantom II's 92 mph maximum), going from 10-100 in 50 seconds and 0-60 in 17.5 (Phantom II, 19.6 seconds). Such figures were an amazing achievement in 1930, when you consider that the chassis alone weighed 37cwt (1880kg). Naturally it meant that the 25-gallon tank emptied at the rate of 10mpg, but for the target market this was of no concern. "A creation evolved from years of racing experience! What more could man ask for?" posed Bentley's sales manager, A.F.C. Hillstead.

With a chassis price at its October 1930 launch of £1850 – pitched just a little higher than that of the Rolls-Royce Phantom II – Bentley's cat must have been stalking the pigeons in the Best Car in the World's garden, and with serious intent.

Barrie Price, founder of the Rolls-Royce & Bentley Specialists Association, rated the 8 Litre highly. Impressed by the efficient breathing of its 24-valve head, he estimated up to a 50 per cent greater power output for the Bentley over the 1930-31 Phantom, so that "road performance was therefore vastly superior" and "the Bentley engine was smoother at the top end", in contrast to the Phantom's, of which he said: "To drive one of these large cars in excess of 70mph is definitely not a pleasure". He also considered the Bentley's steering to be smoother at speed, if heavier, but the Rolls-Royce gearbox was easier to use. Interestingly, despite the attention given to its suspension, he considered the Bentley's rear-seat ride to be inferior.

Bentley clients formed a prestigious queue for the 8 Litre, among them song and dance man Jack Buchanan (debonair warbler of Everything Stops for Tea), the inveterate gambler Lord Brougham & Vaux (who bought two cars), the loyal Duke of Kent, Sir Alex Kleinwort and Spanish nobleman Don Dionisio de Cespedes. Sadly, however, the timing of the 8 Litre's arrival couldn't have been worse. Effects of the Wall Street Crash had reached Britain, bringing with it the Great Depression, and sales of the 8 Litre amounted to a mere hundred examples.

As 8 Litre production tailed off through 1931, the Bentley board – completely against W.O.'s wishes – rushed a cheaper car into production to undercut Rolls-Royce's 20/25. This was the 4 Litre, the engine of which bore little relation to previous units with an untuneable, inlet-over-exhaust, two-valves-per-cylinder head designed by Harry Ricardo. Hastily conceived, relying on a cut-down but still substantial 8 Litre chassis, the 4 Litre – of which only 49 were delivered – was no more than a compromise. Coachbuilders' schedules delayed the completion

W.O. Bentley (centre) had benefited from an apprenticeship in locomotive engineering at the start of his career.

of the final car until January 1933, well over a year after the old Bentley company had ceased to exist.

“Announced at the 1925 Motor Show, the 147bhp newcomer provided American standards of effortless flexibility”

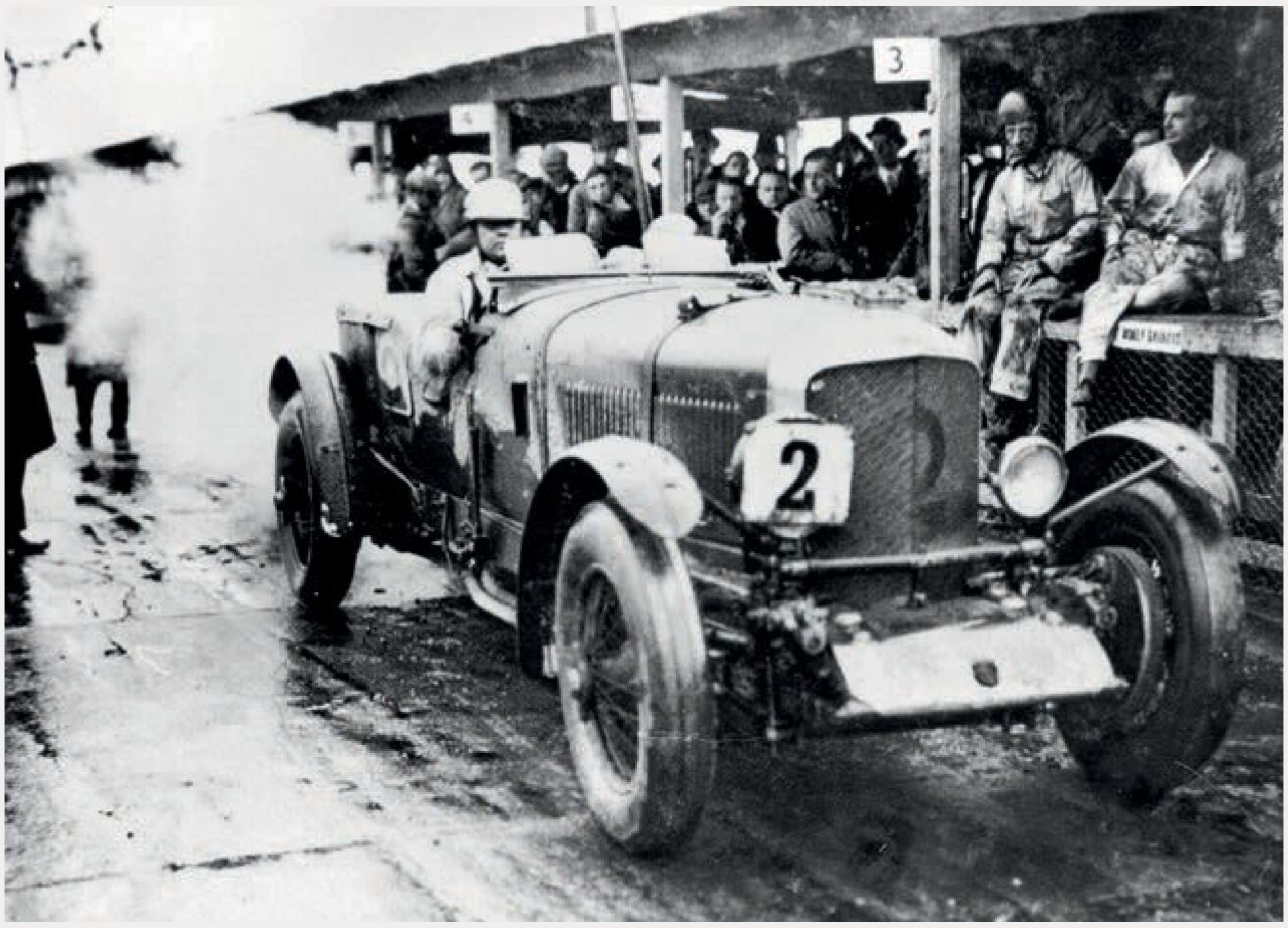
CALLING TIME

The end, when it came, had been a long time brewing. During its first couple of years, the company survived hand-to-mouth on the goodwill of investors, supplemented by a £40,000 mortgage on the Cricklewood plant from The London Life Association. But expanding production facilities for the 3 Litre and developing the 6½ soon exposed underfunding, hence W.O.'s approach to one of his wealthy new customers – Woolf Barnato – in late 1925. Barnato, a flamboyant sportsman and playboy with a family fortune in South African diamond mines, was also a wily City financier. He was certainly prepared to help, but on his own terms.

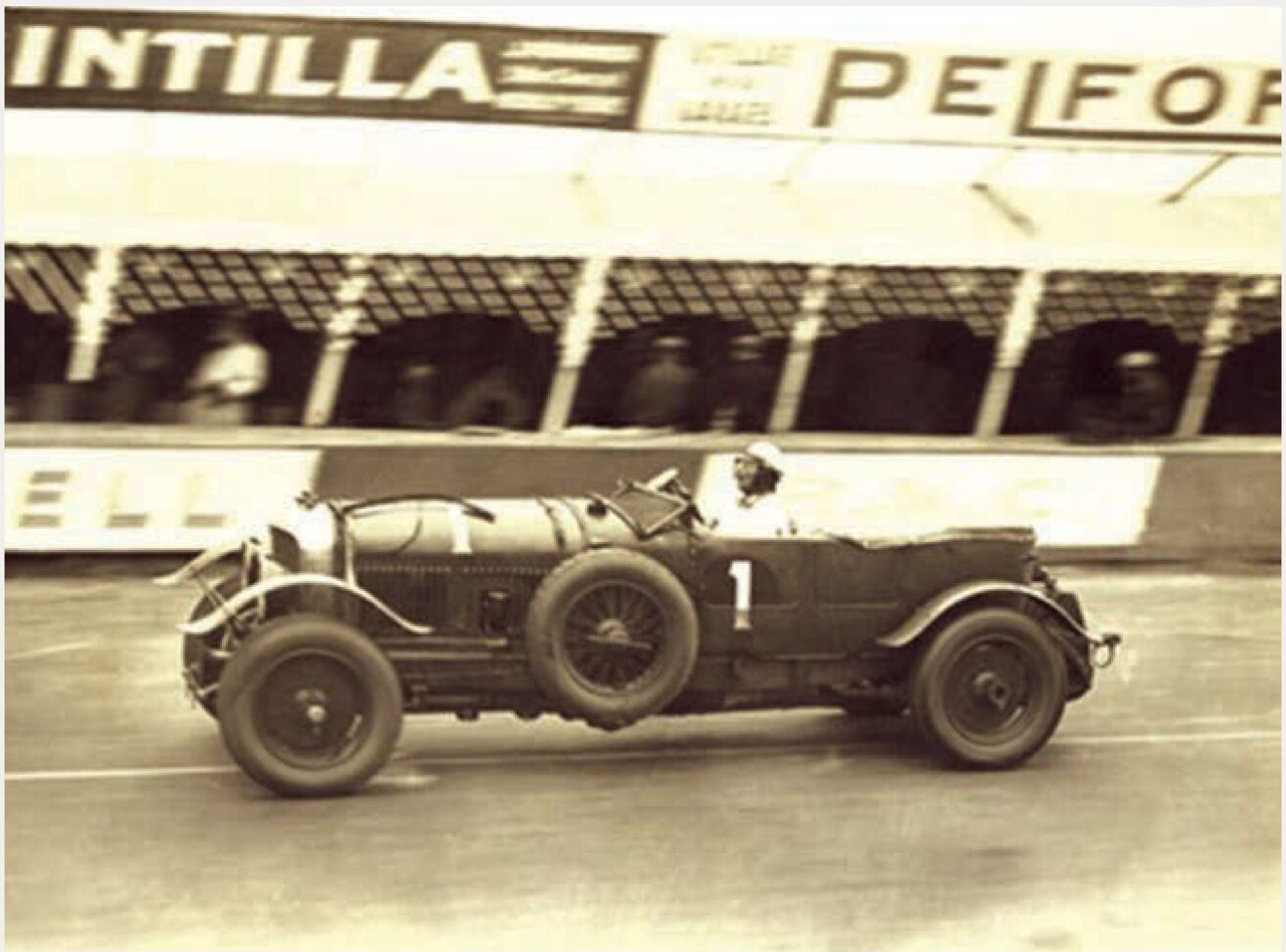
The original company was wound up and existing creditors paid off. Barnato installed himself as chairman, devalued the original £1 shares to one shilling, and implemented a restructured share capital of £175,000. With apparent calm restored, the reconstituted firm could better afford to go racing – with the gossip-column attraction of Barnato himself on the team – and continue with its new-model development. But underneath it all, W.O. had misgivings.

Barnato had brought cronies onto the board, prompting the departure of H.M. Bentley and Hillstead, with W.O.'s own sphere of influence being gradually reduced to control of design and racing. Sadly, it wasn't long before expenditure became rampant again and further mortgages were taken out. The crunch came in July 1931, with neither the company nor Barnato in a position to meet mortgage payments, and the receivers were called in. A statement followed in September, to the effect that “the company by reason of its liabilities cannot conduct its business… and that the company be wound up voluntarily”.

Seeking a lifeline, W.O. conducted useful exploratory discussions with Napier on producing a new Rolls-Royce rival, and receiver Patrick Frere found this reputable Acton-based aero engine and former luxury car manufacturer willing to meet the £103,675 owing to creditors. With »



Woolf Barnato is shown at the wheel of his latest Bentley behemoth at Brooklands in 1930.



Winning at Le Mans in 1929 was Woolf Barnato, shown here driving the ‘Old Number One’ Speed Six to victory.

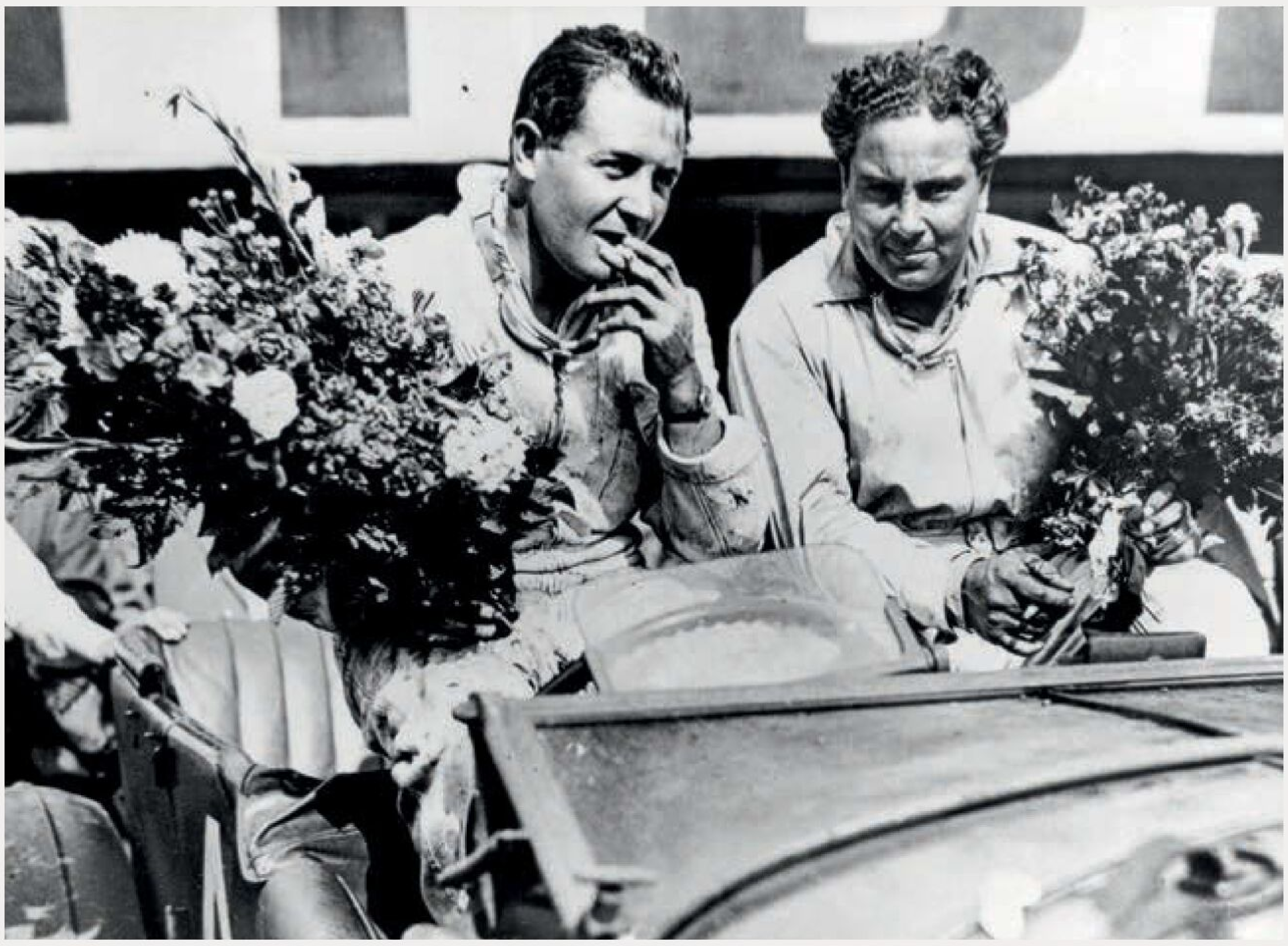
the solution so seemingly in the bag, Frere treated the Bentley staff to dinner and a show on the strength of it. But when the hopefuls returned to court to complete formalities, counsel for another contender – the mysterious British Central Equitable Trust – had turned up. The parties were instructed to make sealed bids and the Trust, which turned out to be representing Rolls-Royce, won with an offer of £125,256. It proved how much the Bentley 8 Litre had worried Derby, for Rolls-Royce's managing director, Sir Arthur Sidgreaves, was quoted as saying that "apart from anything else, [the acquisition] was important from the point of view of removing the competition".

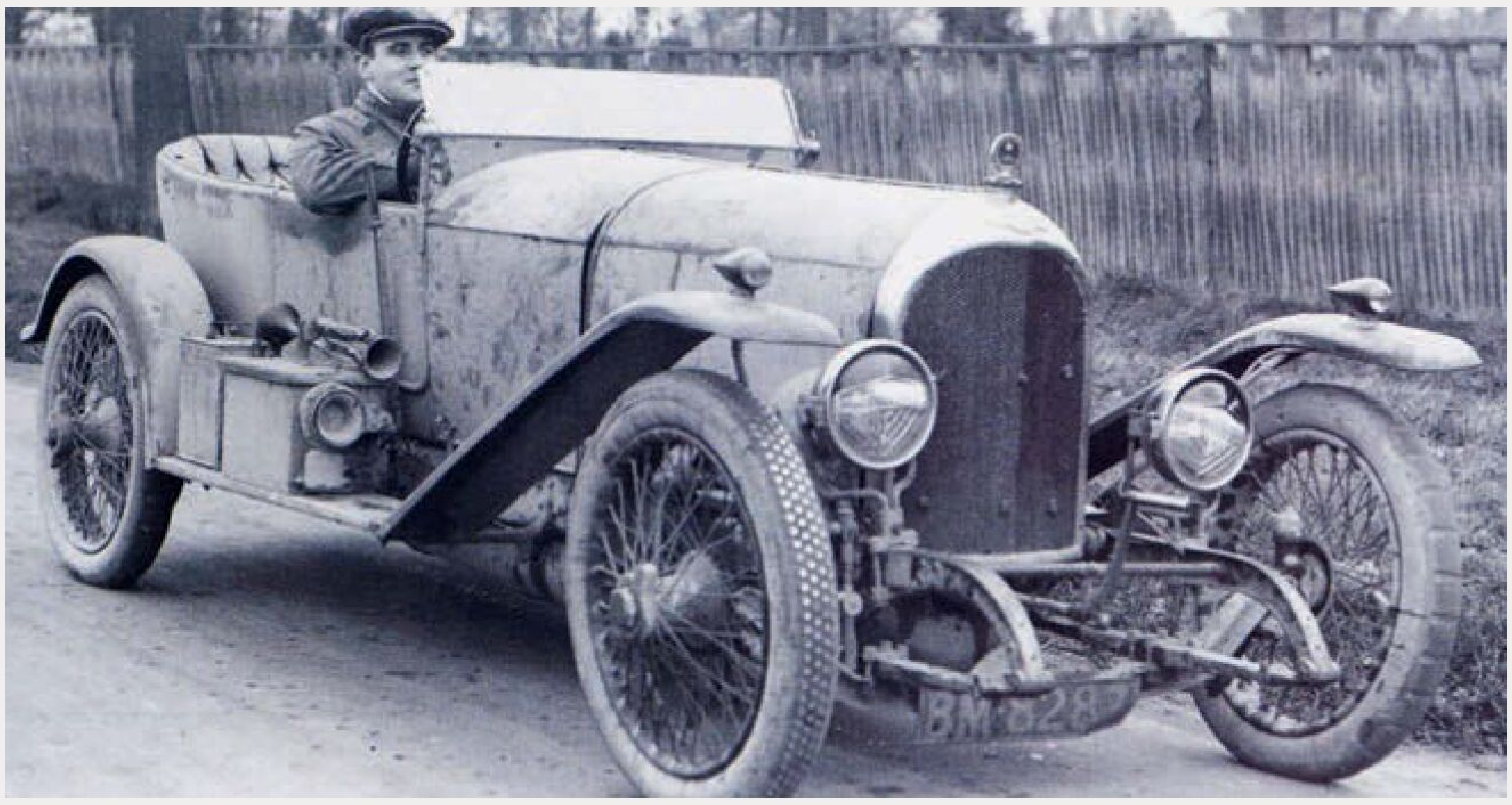
Bentley Motors' troubled but glorious independent years were at an end – but could the company's fate have been any different? Hindsight may argue that the company tried to run before it could walk. Perhaps it should have begun by producing fewer cars per week in a smaller plant before mortgaging itself to the hilt, or pruned the workforce when times were difficult. But why shouldn't Bentley and his team, blessed with such an acclaimed product, have assumed that things would only get better? As for laying off men, this would have been anathema to W.O. Bentley himself: "My greatest contribution was that I chose my staff well," he once said. Less time and money spent on racing would certainly have helped. But wouldn't that have affected sales of the catalogued models, as well as the lasting charisma of the brand, which today owes so much to the Cricklewood era?

There was, of course, little left of the special brew by 1931. Production of the 3 Litre chassis had officially ended in 1927, the last examples leaving the coachbuilders' factories two years later. The noble 6½ Litre was gone by February/March 1930, and as marque authority Michael Hay later confirmed, "it was becoming increasingly difficult to sell the 4½ Litre, leaving Bentley with only the 8 Litre to sell in the middle of the Depression".

Thus, albeit stretching the point slightly for the 8 Litre, the cars and the aura they created belong firmly to the romantic '20s, bearing the undiluted stamp of one man. The marvel was that when times were desperate, W.O. was able to get finery like the 6½ Litre designed and produced at all, as author Michael Frostick later explained: "In terms of managing on too little for too long, [Bentley] excelled almost everyone in the whole history of the motor car". Bentley's era of independence was at an end, but the legacy left behind was second to none. ■

"As 8 Litre production tailed off through 1931, the Bentley board rushed a cheaper car into production"


Glen Kidston (left) and Woolf Barnato – two of the best-known names in racing during the early days of Bentley.



W.O. Bentley at the wheel of the prototype Bentley 3 Litre in January 1920.

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1991 Bentley Continental Convertible - Stock: #A1304

Coachwork by Mulliner Park Ward and finished in its factory color Black over a black interior with a veneer trim. One of only 421 variants produced for the year 1991. Automatic transmission with steering column control, 6.8-liter V8 engine, power steering, four-wheel disc brakes, single exhaust outlet, four-spoke steering wheel, quad halogen headlights, side marker lights, chrome trim, 15-inch alloy wheels, and a full-size spare tire. Air conditioning, cruise control, dual-side mirrors, analog clock, Sony stereo, and power-adjustable front seat. For $67,500

1952 Bentley Mark VI James Young Coupe Stock#18071

Equipped with a 4-speed manual, inline-six engine, SU dual carburetors, Smiths instrumentation, Lucas-branded fog lights, interior wood trim, chrome trim, chrome bumpers with overriders, 3-spoke steering wheel, whitewall tires, and 15-inch steel wheels. **For $49,950**

1953 Bentley R-Type - Stock#16325

Equipped with a column-mounted manual transmission, 4.5-liter straight six engine, dual carburetors, Smiths instruments, dual exhaust outlets, iconic Bentley "Flying B" hood ornament, Lucas-branded front fog light, 3-spoke steering wheel, Bentley-branded hub caps, jack, and a full-size spare tire fitted in the trunk. **For $32,500**

1957 Bentley S1 - Stock#18321

Equipped with an automatic transmission with steering column control, straight-six engine, Stromberg dual carburetors, single exhaust outlet, Smiths instrumentation, chrome trim, chrome bumpers with overriders, Lucas branded taillights/Fog lights, three-spoke steering wheel, chrome radiator grille, "Flying B" hood ornament, Coker Classic white-wall tires, 15-inch wire wheels with Bentley hubcaps, jack, and a spare tire. **For $29,950**

1964 Bentley S3 Saloon - Stock#17818

Equipped with an automatic transmission with steering column control, V8 engine, dual carburetors, single exhaust outlet, Smiths instrumentation, Lucas fog lights, chrome bumpers with overriders, front/rear bench seating, jack, and 15-inch wheels with whitewall tires. **For $24,750**

1953 Bentley R-Type Saloon Stock#17180

Equipped with an automatic transmission, straight six engine, SU dual carburetors, Smiths instrumentation, dual exhaust outlets, chrome trim, chrome bumpers with overriders, chrome radiator grille, an iconic Bentley "Flying B" hood ornament, manual-crank windows, 3-spoke steering wheel, and Bentley-branded hub caps.**For $24,750**

1954 Bentley R-Type - Stock#17182

quipped with a highly desirable automatic transmission, six-cylinder engine, SU dual carburetors, Smiths instrumentation, sunroof, interior wood trim, chrome bumpers with overriders, chrome radiator grille, trafficators, an iconic Bentley "Flying B" hood ornament, 3-spoke steering wheel, whitewall tires, Bentley-branded hub caps, jack, and a full-size spare tire fitted in the trunk. **For $19,950**

1954 Bentley R-Type Saloon-Stock#18337

Equipped with a rare automatic transmission, straight-six engine, SU dual carburetors, dual exhaust outlets, Smiths instrumentation, steel bumpers, 3-spoke steering wheel, fender-mounted rearview mirrors, steel wheels with Bentley-branded hub caps, BFGoodirch white-wall tires, and a full-size spare tire in the trunk. The rear-hinged coach doors add a touch of elegance, making a grand entrance every time you step out of the vehicle.**For $19,750**

1952 Bentley R Type Saloon - Stock #16182

Equipped with a manual transmission, inline-six engine, dual carburetors, Smiths instruments, dual exhaust outlets, sunroof, interior wood trim, chrome radiator grille, three-spoke steering wheel, Bentley-branded hub caps, whitewall tires, folding picnic trays, sun visors, a passenger dash grab handle, and extra parts on the side. An extremely elegant British classic that is ready to be enjoyed and is mechanically sound. **For $16,750**

1954 Bentley R-Type Saloon - Stock#17213

Equipped with a rare automatic transmission, straight six engine, SU dual carburetors, dual exhaust outlets, chrome trim, chrome bumpers with overriders, chrome radiator grille, an iconic Bentley "Flying B" hood ornament, manual-crank windows, vent windows, whitewall tires, and Bentley hub caps. This classic comes with a blue-plate California car with a 1989 sticker. **For $15,750**

1956 Bentley Saloon - Stock#17216

Equipped with a rare automatic transmission with steering column control, straight-six engine, SU dual carburetors, dual exhaust outlets, Smiths instrumentation, sunroof, Lucas-branded front fog lights, chrome trim/bumpers, interior wood trim, 3-spoke steering wheel, fender-mounted side mirrors, Bridgestone tires, Bentley-branded hub caps, jack, and a full-size spare tire. **For $14,750**

1967 Bentley T1 - Stock#17623

Equipped with an automatic transmission with steering column control, V8 engine, power steering, SU dual carburetors, single exhaust outlet, Webasto sunroof, folding picnic trays, chrome trim/bumpers, interior wood trim, 2-spoke steering wheel, Blaupunkt radio, and a side mirror. And of course, no Bentley would be complete without the iconic "Flying B" hood ornament, a symbol of prestige and luxury.
For $9,750

1949 Bentley Mark VI Saloon - Stock#18338

Equipped with a 4-speed manual transmission, straight-six engine, SU dual carburetors, single exhaust outlet, Smiths instrumentation, chrome bumpers, 3-spoke steering wheel, rear-hinged front doors, 16-inch steel wheels with Bentley-branded hub caps. Features amenities include bucket seating, folding picnic trays, and vent windows. **For $8,950**

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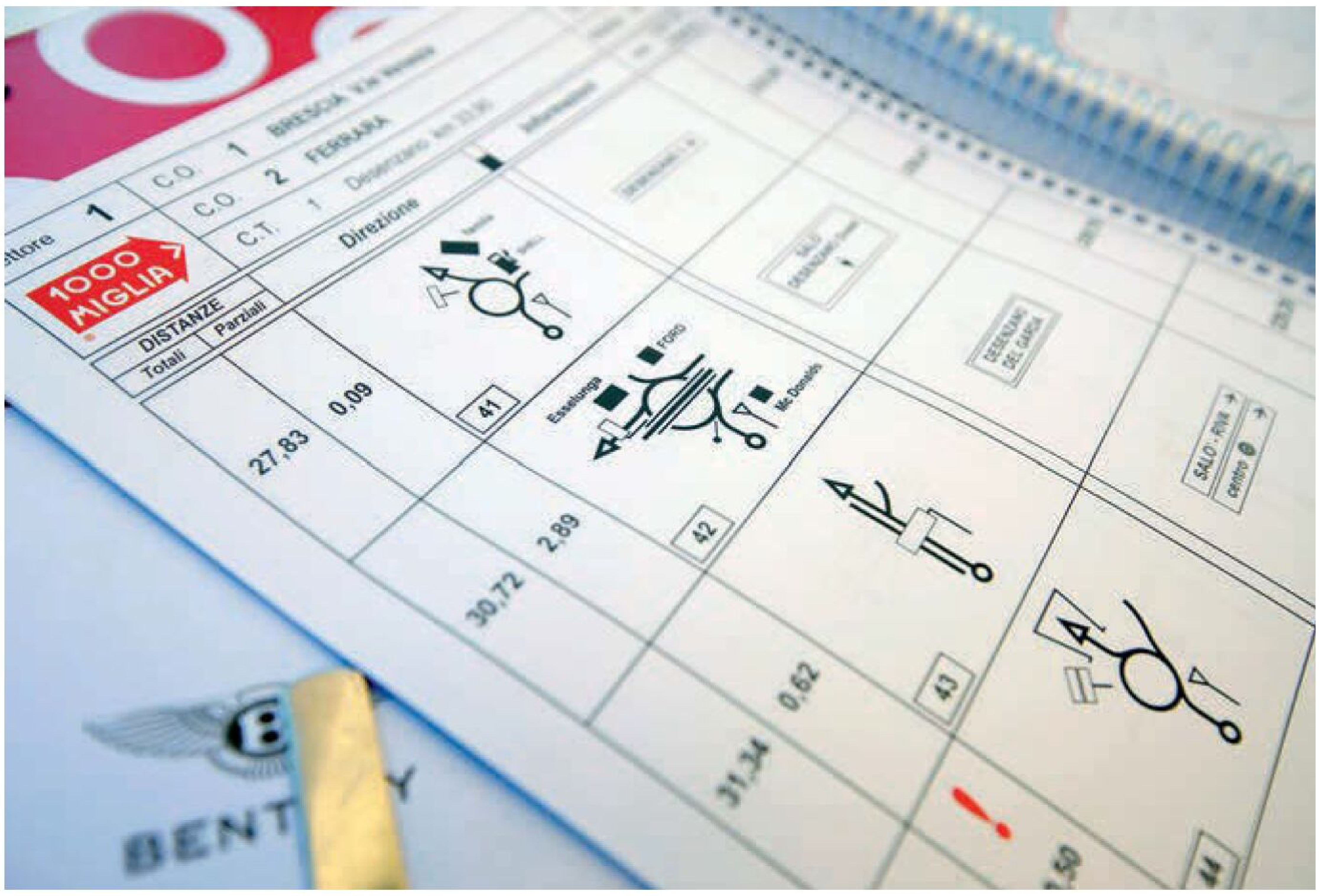
1000 MILES ABOARD A LEGEND

What could be better than tackling the legendary Mille Miglia at the wheel of Bentley Motors' ex-Birkin 'Blower'? Ian Adcock recalls the ups and downs of a trip of a lifetime

As a primary school child, one of the Adcock family homes was 29 Birkin Avenue, just down the road from Chetwynd Road in Toton, on the outskirts of Nottingham. Neither name meant anything to me until my interest in cars grew, and I learned about the extraordinary exploits of Tim Birkin with his 'Blower' Bentley at Le Mans. I also learned that his mother was the Honourable Margaret Chetwynd.

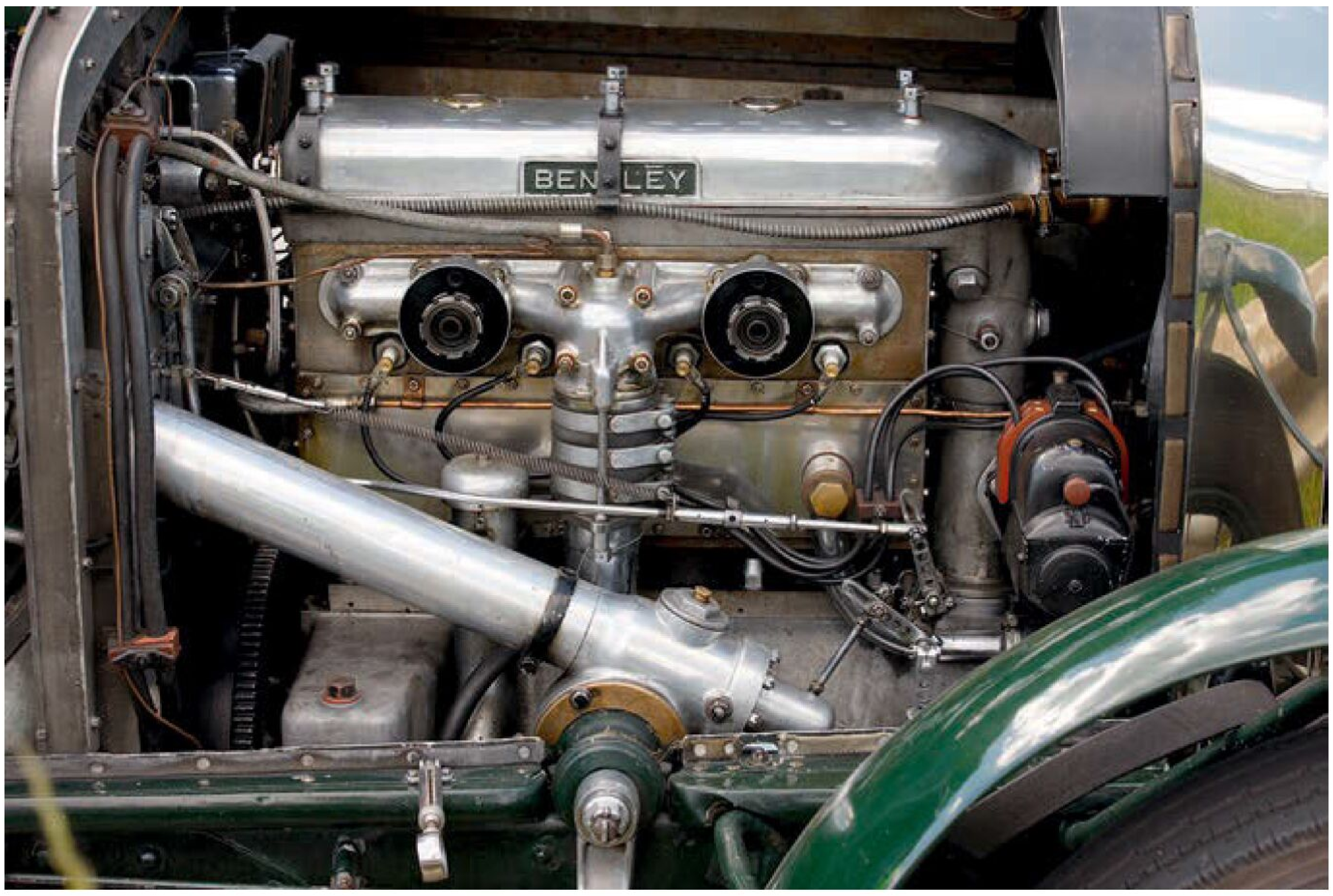
Little did I realise that my subsequent childhood dream of driving a 'Blower' – as well as actually competing in one – would eventually come true. It was in the spring of 2012 that I received a telephone call from Bentley Motors' Richard Charlesworth, then overseer of the marque's Heritage Collection. He asked if I would like to participate in that year's Mille Miglia in the legendary ex-Birkin Le Mans 'Blower' – and of course, without even consulting my diary, I knew that the answer was a resounding yes.

I already considered myself fortunate to have competed in the 2000 event driving a 1937 BMW 328, in which I'd finished an ignominious 218th. An opportunity to compete again twelve years later – this time aboard such an iconic Bentley – was one not to be missed.



First run in 1927, the Mille Miglia belongs to an era when the words 'health' and 'safety' never appeared in the same sentence, and before Armco – never mind disc brakes and seatbelts – had yet to be invented. Races were run at a furious pace down often unsealed roads, threading their way through tiny hamlets with throngs of spectators just inches from the speeding cars.

It isn't until you drive the roads that Moss and Jenkinson famously sped over in 1955, averaging nearly 98mph in their Mercedes-Benz 300SL to win that year's race in a little over 10 hours, that you realise the event's madness. And it is only with hindsight that we can see such speed would inevitably lead to fatalities, which it did in 1957 when de Portago lost control of his Ferrari 335 S, killing nine people (including five children) stood at the roadside in Guidizzolo. A second crash, in Brescia, took the life of Joseph Göttgens, driving a Triumph TR3. Adding to the 46 who had been killed over the previous 30 years, the authorities – including the Vatican – demanded »



that the event be discontinued.

It was briefly resurrected for three years from 1958 as a road rally, with the modern version revived as a regulatory run in 1977. Theoretically, only cars that have already competed in the Mille Miglia are eligible, but this being Italy the qualification seems more to be a case of 'if it has four wheels and is interesting'. At the Brescia scrutineering I spied VW Beetles of varying vintages, a Citroen DS21, a Saab 93 and even a 1953 Lincoln Capri.

The event justly deserves its *"la corsa più bella del monde"* ("the most beautiful race in the world") description thanks to the participation of works teams from industry giants like Mercedes-Benz, Audi, BMW, Porsche and Alfa Romeo, who prepare priceless museum exhibits and pour millions into hiring professional driving teams or former racers such as Jochen Mass, Jan Lammers, Gijs Van Lennep, and father-and-son team Toine and Mike Hezemans. (Jacky Ickx was also on hand in 2012 as brand ambassador for the event sponsor, Chopard.)

The Mille Millia attracts private entrants as well, of course, from all over the world – enthusiasts who are wealthy enough to indulge their passion for cars, even if that doesn't quite extend to striving for the most competitive time during the regulatory stages. And as well as the estimated four million spectators who throng the roads, there are increasing numbers of enthusiasts in their own classics who follow the route and the competitors, very often hindering progress along the way.

BIRKIN 'BLOWER'

Bentley acquired Birkin's 'Blower' in 2000, following a telephone conversation between its then owner, the late Victor Gauntlett (former proprietor of Aston Martin-Lagonda) and Charlesworth: "I had always said to Victor that if he ever wanted to sell the car, call me first and, true to his word, he gave Bentley first refusal."

When asked how much the company paid for the car, Richard Charlesworth responded with a lopsided grin: "Let's put it this way, I had to make a personal telephone call to Ferdinand Piech [the autocratic chairman of VAG, which had acquired Bentley in 1998] for his authorisation. Fortunately, he didn't hesitate in releasing the funds."

There is still something quintessentially British about the

> **"First run in 1927, the Mille Miglia belongs to an era when the words 'health' and 'safety' never appeared in the same sentence"**

'Blower', of course, in its pomp and engineering. The castings and their bolts, along with the girder-like chassis sections, betray W.O.'s engineering philosophy, forged by his apprenticeship at the Great Northern Railway works in Doncaster in the early 1900s. It's little wonder Ian Fleming decided that the most British of fictional spies, Commander James Bond (007), should drive one in *Casino Royale*.

This particular example – UU 5872 – is the most famous of the five race team cars that Birkin commissioned in 1927, sponsored by racehorse owner Dorothy Paget. The factory assembled a further 50 for homologation, complete with the Amherst Villiers engineered supercharger that, according to W.O., "corrupted the engine and design". Still, it upped the standard car's output to 160bhp and, with the aid of a more robust crank, added a further 50bhp for the race cars.

Almost a century ago, those were serious power outputs with performance to match. Charlesworth claims that this car's top speed is "in the region of 125mph", although with its skinny tyres and massive all-round drum brakes it would take some courage to exploit the 1.7-ton Bentley's potential. After all, here is a car with a steering wheel that wouldn't look out of place on a racing yacht, while the handbrake is located to the driver's right on the outside of the Vanden Plas canvas bodywork, with the gated four-speed gearchange snug to the driver's right thigh. Thankfully, at some time in its past, a previous owner wisely decided to rearrange the pedals from its original central throttle arrangement to today's layout of it being to the right.

CHALLENGING DRIVE

There was a carnival atmosphere to Brescia as a perfect Italian spring day bathed in blue skies and glorious sun heralded the Mille Miglia's start. The previous evening, Richard and I had presented our documentation and the car to the scrutineers; with its 49-feet turning circle, manhandling the big beast within the tight confines of the scrutineering shed was a sobering reminder of my relative lack of fitness and muscle power, something that was only emphasised on my first drive.

For those of us brought up on a diet of 1960s sports cars (an MGA in my case), a 'Blower' Bentley comes as a rude awakening. For a start, there's the driver and passenger entry/exit etiquette, as there's only one door and that's on the passenger side; and with two seats tighter than a Ryanair flight, there's a constant shuffling between the twosome on board at driver swaps and comfort breaks.

Then there's the issue of a starting procedure that's as convoluted as Captain Kirk firing up the Enterprise. First you fumble for the electrics master switch and Bakelite fuel switch, then fiddle with the magneto and »

39
UU 5872
GH 6951

> "Both second and third gears are capable of getting the Bentley moving from almost a walking pace"

ignition before prodding the starter button and… BOOM… the quartet of cylinders burst into life like cannons from the *1812 Overture*, accompanied by a blue haze of exhaust fumes.

I also had to get used to the Bentley's non-synchro 'D' box, which required double de-clutching up and down its four ratios with a hefty prod of the right boot to raise the revs sufficiently to overcome the drivetrain's inertia, with a determined yank on the lever to slot it into the gate. Too gentle and it sounded like it was chewing boulders. Patience had its rewards, but second to third and vice-versa was a bit of a lottery. The heavy steering lightened as speed gathered, and even those massive drums were relatively reassuring as long as there was plenty of anticipation employed in slowing the beast down. Once on the move, even the rudimentary (by today's standards) suspension coped well with the Italian byways and highways.

There was no real need to push the revs to their limit, as the 'Blower' had plenty of pulling power even at well below 3000rpm; once we'd got the car rolling, there was no real virtue in constantly swopping

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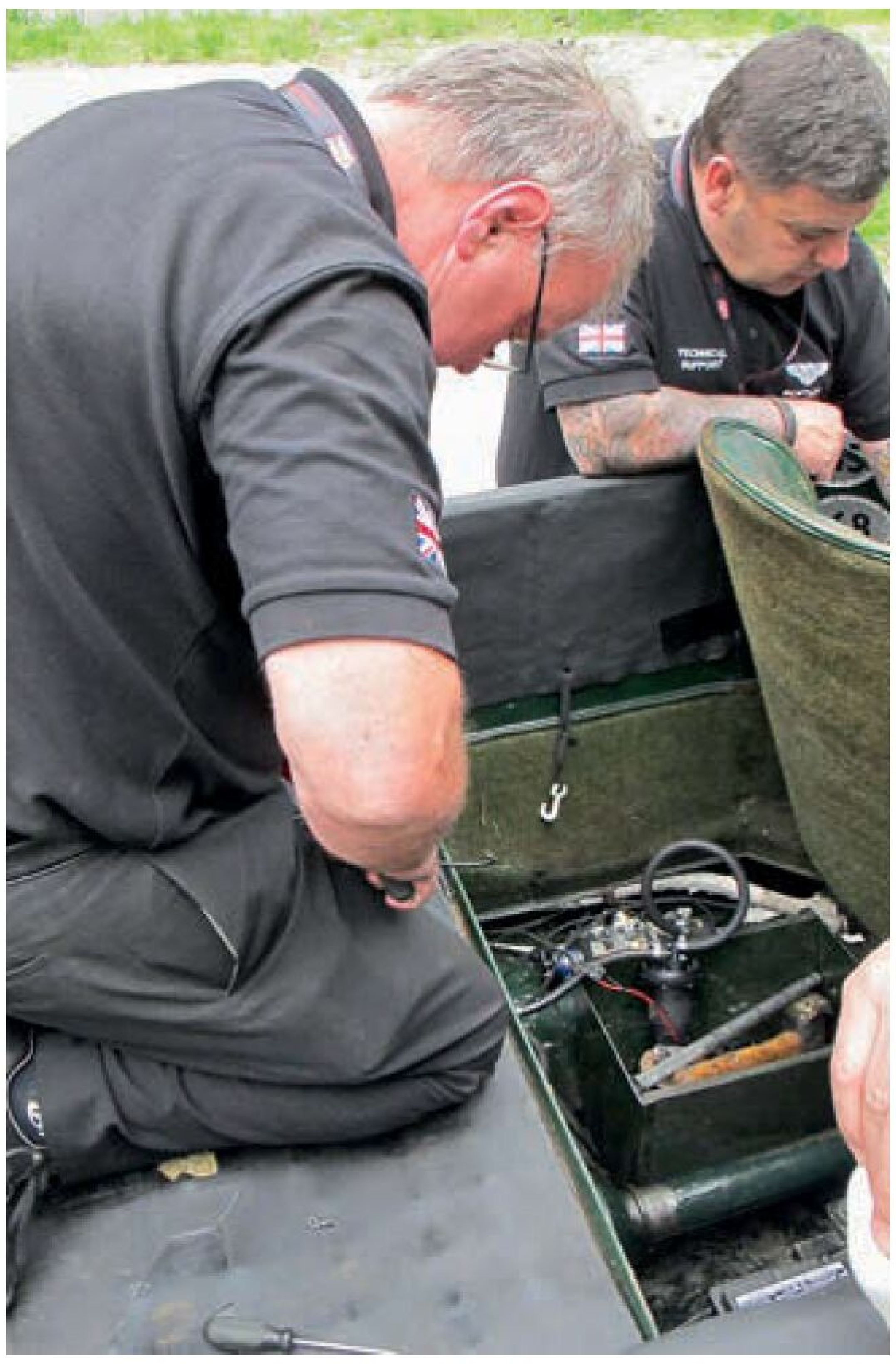


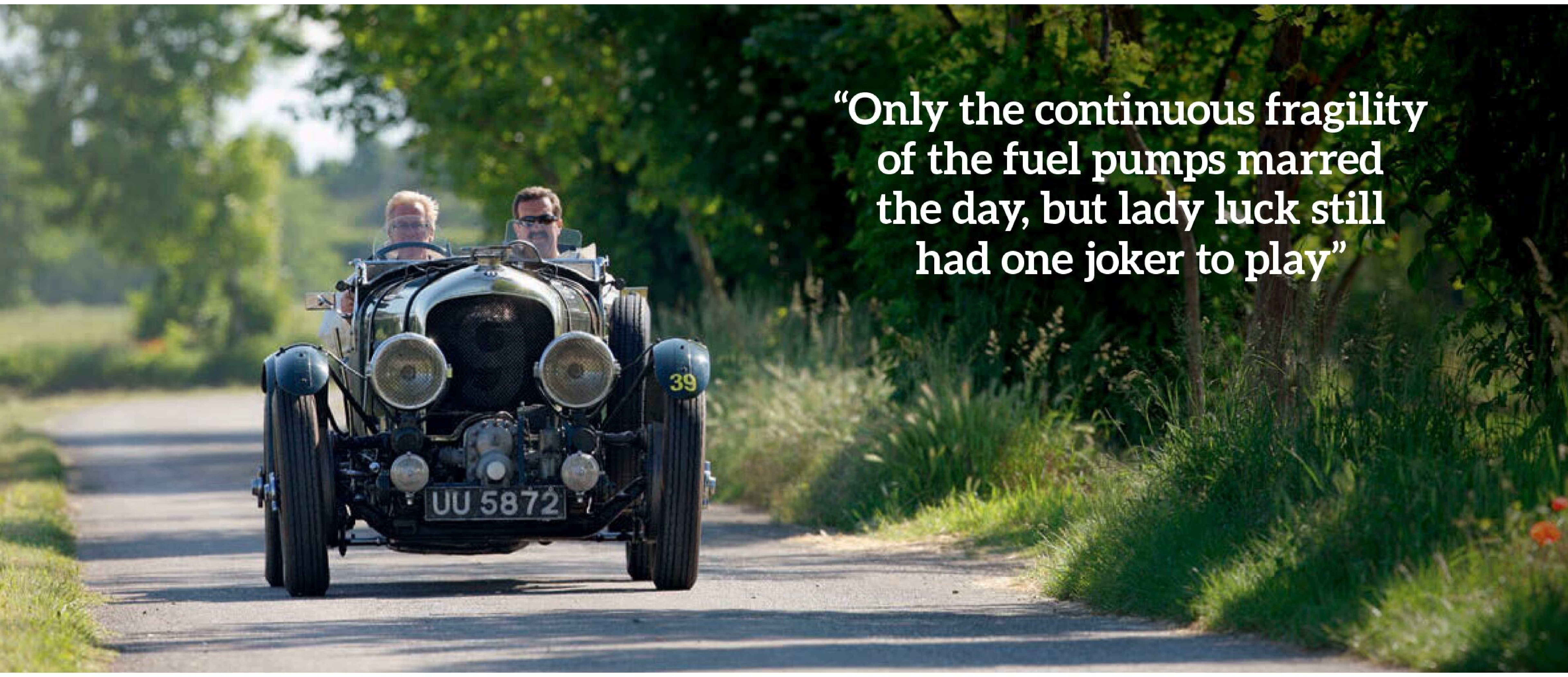
cogs, as both second and third are capable of getting the Bentley moving from almost a walking pace.

In the other 'Blower' that was also competing, Bentley's then engineering director, Ralf Frech, had a fiendish digital timing and navigation device, while Richard and I relied on trusty stopwatches. In any case, we were very much of the 'it's the taking part that counts' school, although not as extreme as some entrants who simply spent the time cruising, choosing to soak up the stunning Italian scenery and spectacular city sites. With the benefit of hindsight, our policy paid dividends… although it nearly came undone on one section where, much to our embarrassment, we finished just outside the top 10.

The first hint of trouble came at one o'clock on the first day, when the 'Blower' coughed and spluttered its way to the kerbside, the big SUs starved of fuel by a blocked filter. Unfortunately though, this was just the start of our woes, as having passed Via Maggio (a mere 137 into the 1000 miles), the car ground to a halt again when the fuel pump failed. It took mechanic Frank Meakins nearly three hours to rig a second pump to bypass the errant one before we could set off for Rome; hearing the first cuckoo of spring was the highlight of that particular stop…

Charlesworth and I took the corporate decision to head straight for Rome, missing all that afternoon's stages and trials to arrive at the Stadio Olimpico just before 9.00pm. As a result, we incurred 203,138 penalties, which pretty much did for us in the final standings.

Pandemonium ensued at the stadium, with the Carabinieri blowing whistles more ferociously than any striking British Leyland worker, while tired drivers were having tantrums as their precious cars overheated in the traffic jam – exasperated by one driver heaving aside some railings to form another exit into another jam. An hour passed before we also joined »



> "Only the continuous fragility of the fuel pumps marred the day, but lady luck still had one joker to play"

that queue… oh, and the magneto jammed on. But at 10.15pm, we finally set off for a tour of the eternal city, past the Castel Sant'angelo and on to St Peter's Basilica. It would be nice to think that the then Pope was one of the thousands who were cheering and waving the contestants through the night and on to a well-deserved (and far too short) sleep.

BACK ON THE ROAD

My alarm dragged me early from my slumber in time for our 6.42am start the next day. The northern leg of the Mille Miglia turned out to be a blur of stunning scenery and spectacular towns that, for one special day, open their gates to the world's greatest parade of classic cars. Dropping down into Siena's main square, weaving around Bologna's narrow lanes and then being guided through Maranello for a lap of Ferrari's Fiorano test track with the then recently opened Museo Casa Enzo Ferrari in the background are bucket list memories that I'll treasure forever.

Only the continuous fragility of the fuel pumps marred the day, but lady luck still had one joker to play. At one o'clock in the morning and with the finishing ramp in sight, steam began to billow from the radiator: the 20-amp fuse for the fans had blown and we had no spare. Not only that, we were so far behind that the service crews had long since departed. Between us, however, Richard and I rigged up a spare 10-amp and hoped it was man enough to see us the few hundred yards to – and over – the finish line.

The thought of pushing 1.7 tons of Bentley in the early hours of the morning was just too much to consider. Fortunately, however, the fuse lasted and we limped over the line at 2.00am, greeted by the graveyard shift commentator. We were the last official finishers of the 2012 Mille Miglia.

I was awake the next day by mid-morning and, suitably famished, headed for breakfast with the rest of the Bentley team. One of them asked if I had seen the news, only to then tell me there had been an earthquake (measuring 4.5-plus on the Richter scale) in the Emilia-Romagna region that we had driven through just the day before, followed by dozens of aftershocks throughout the area. "Didn't it wake you?" he asked.

"Er… no," I replied. It was, I realised, the only time the earth had moved and I had never felt a thing. ■

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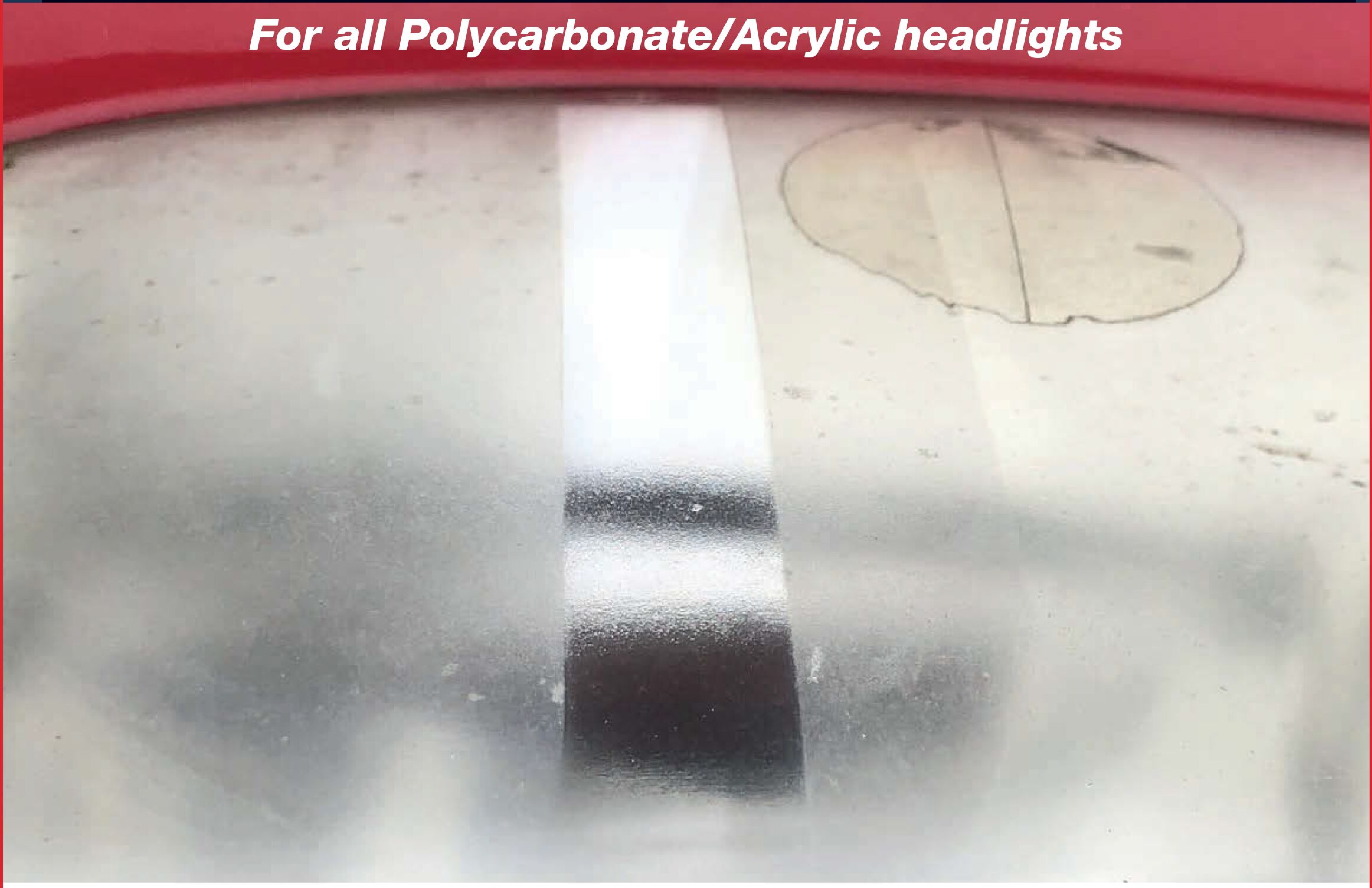
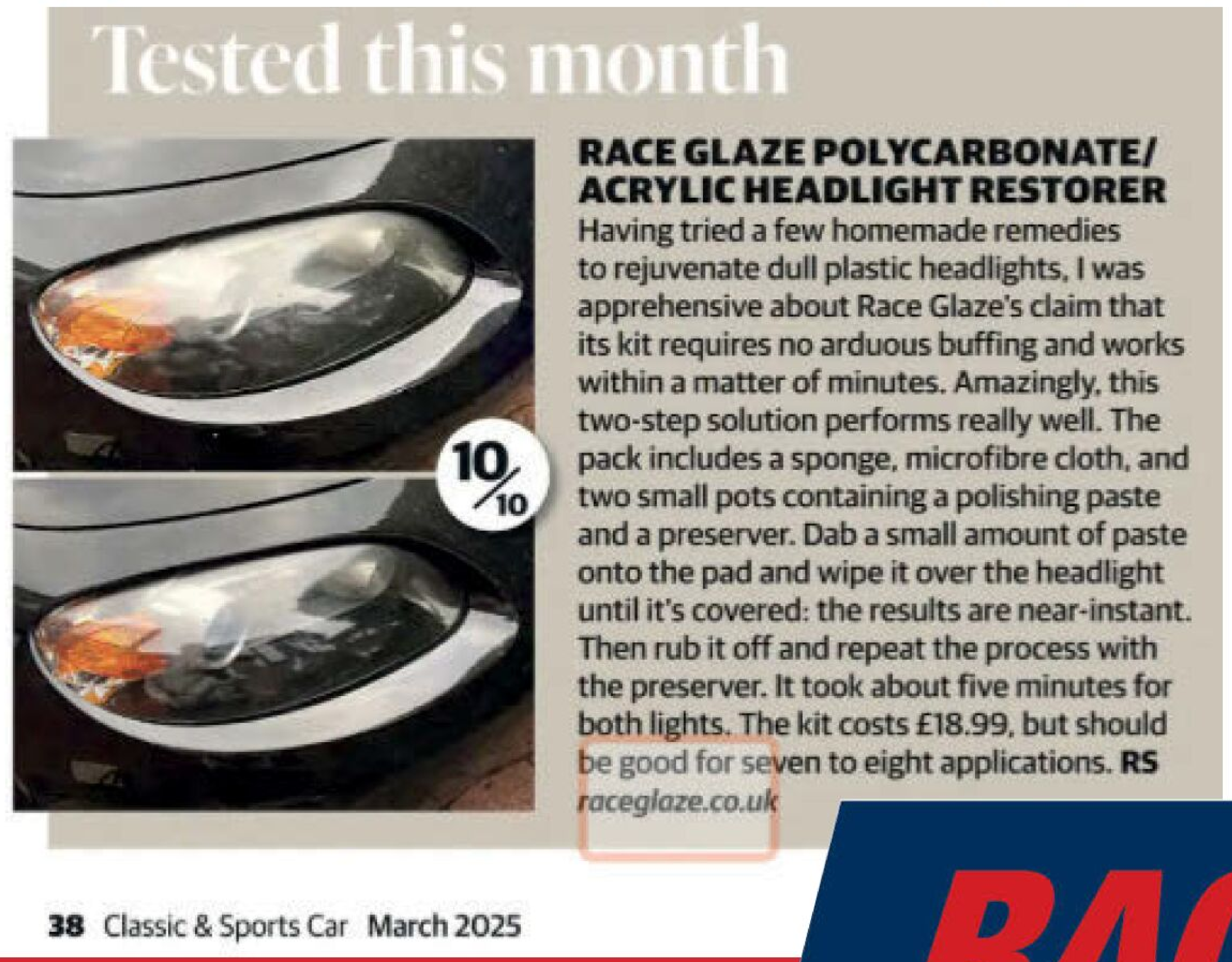


Rated 10/10 by Classic & Sportscar (March'25), highly recommended Practical Classics (Sept.'24)



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Having tried a few homemade remedies to rejuvenate dull plastic headlights, I was apprehensive about Race Glaze's claim that its kit requires no arduous buffing and works within a matter of minutes. Amazingly, this two-step solution performs really well. The pack includes a sponge, microfibre cloth, and two small pots containing a polishing paste and a preserver. Dab a small amount of paste onto the pad and wipe it over the headlight until it's covered: the results are near-instant. Then rub it off and repeat the process with the preserver. It took about five minutes for both lights. The kit costs £18.99, but should be good for seven to eight applications. **RS**
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10/10

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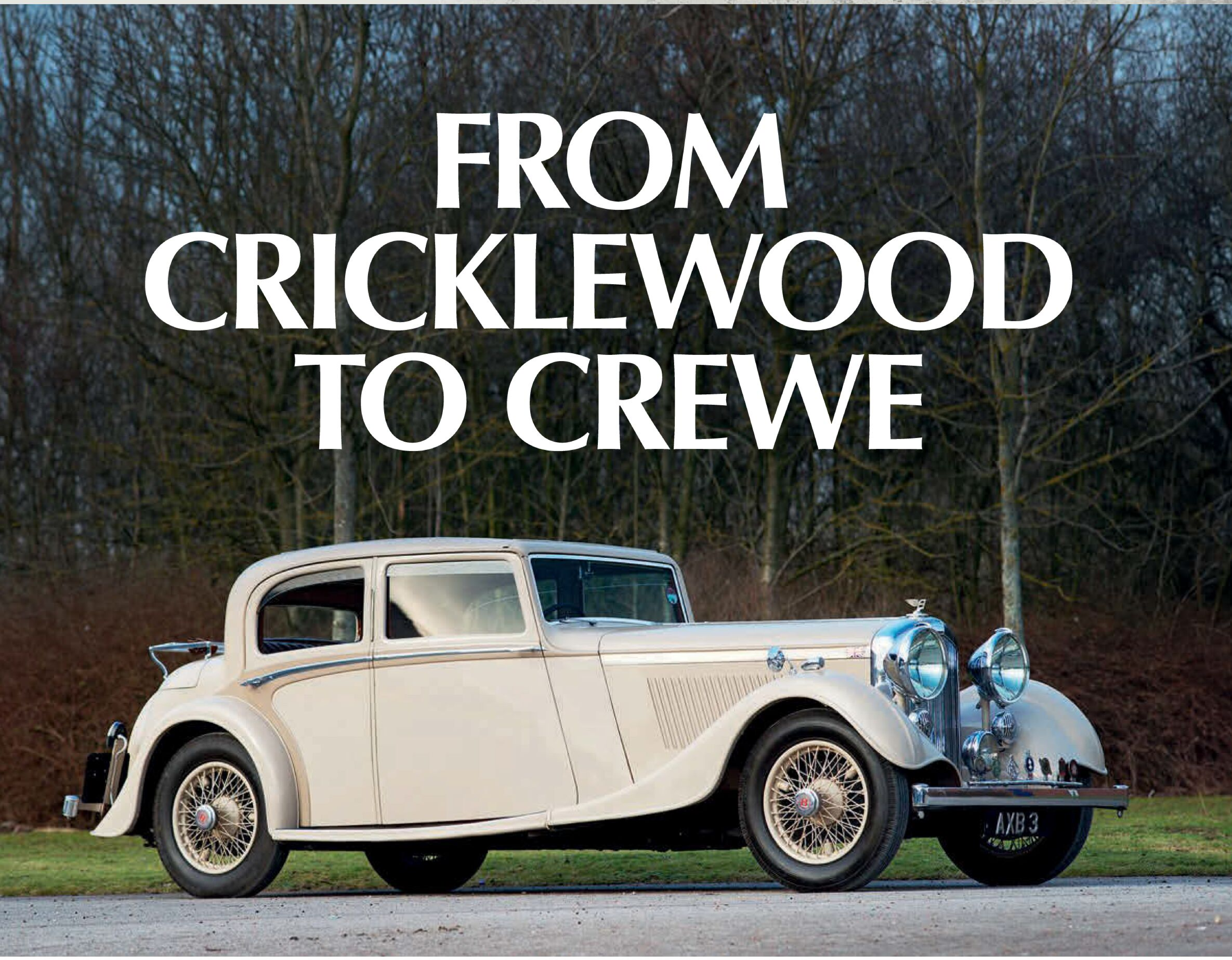


FROM CRICKLEWOOD TO CREWE

Rolls-Royce's 1931 acquisition of the firm meant the end of Bentley Motors as an independent concern. We take a look at the early post-independence years and the move to badge-engineering

It was a sad day when W.O. Bentley was instructed to dispose of his 8 Litre at Jack Barclays, walking home with just £100 to his name. In what might be seen as a fit of corporate paranoia, Rolls-Royce had bought not only the works, showrooms and unused chassis as part of its acquisition of Bentley, but also the man himself – ensuring that he could not rear his head in competition with them again for a very long time. W.O. was to have no hand whatsoever in any new Bentley's design, nor invited onto the board. Instead, he was to have a string of odd jobs over the next three years, looking after the demonstration fleet at the main London showrooms, testing cars and assisting at press receptions.

As to the form that the new Bentley was to take, there was no settled plan. Before acquiring Bentley Motors, Rolls-Royce had been working on a scaled-down 20/25, codenamed Peregrine – a close-coupled, smaller-engined 16/18hp four-seater. As a way of giving him something to do, W.O. was sent out on test with this "very nice little car, carrying a rather dainty radiator". However, it was soon apparent that Peregrine couldn't be produced in large enough numbers for cost-effective production, nor show much of a price difference over the existing models. With pressure mounting to do something constructive with the Bentley marque, the Experimental Department's leading lights of Ernest Hives and W.A. Robotham reasoned that instead of going to waste, Peregrine's chassis could be adapted as a basis for the proposed Bensport (as it was known internally).

But what about the engine? Among the many projects Sir Henry Royce was cramming into the last full year of his life was the development of a supercharged 2.4-litre unit, which the sales team was confident would attract clientele, in a car of Alfa Romeo-like character. The test team took an un-supercharged prototype to France on one of its exhaustive endurance tests, but found that with the car's 'English' gearing the engine was running so continuously at 5000rpm that the bearings were breaking up after just a few thousand miles. So, that put paid to both the engine and the supercharger idea.

With time marching on and the prospect of buyers losing interest, the Experimental Department suggested installing the 3669cc Rolls-Royce 20/25 engine in the Peregrine chassis. "To our great relief," recalled Robotham, "Royce accepted our lash-up as a basis for his final designs on October 24th, 1932". It also made production sense to have one engine serving two different models, albeit with the Bentley's being adapted via a crossflow head, twin carburettors and a modified camshaft – enough, together with a few boy-racer touches like milled valve cover nuts, different filler cap and monogrammed 'B' floor mats, to give Bensport a character of its own.

Evolved from the 3½ Litre was the new 4¼, shown here with Vanden Plas drophead coachwork.

"W.O. had completed his obligatory three-year stint when he was invited by Lagonda to be its technical director"

The Rolls-Royce takeover of Bentley inevitably meant the end of the road for the 8 Litre.

NO "BLOODY THUMP"

With three cars shown to the press in September 1933 at the Royal Hotel, Ascot, deliveries of the 3½ Litre began early in 1934. There was no doubt that the "lash-up" had resulted in what P.G. Wodehouse would have called "an all-round good egg". Not over-large (typically 16 feet long by nearly six feet in width), it looked well-proportioned in most of the body styles that clothed it; and with 75mph in third and a 90mph maximum, it was up there with the Alvis Speed 20, Railton Straight Eight and the newly-introduced 3.3-litre Bugatti Type 57, to which the Bentley was closest in price. Economy was about average for the class, too, at 16mpg.

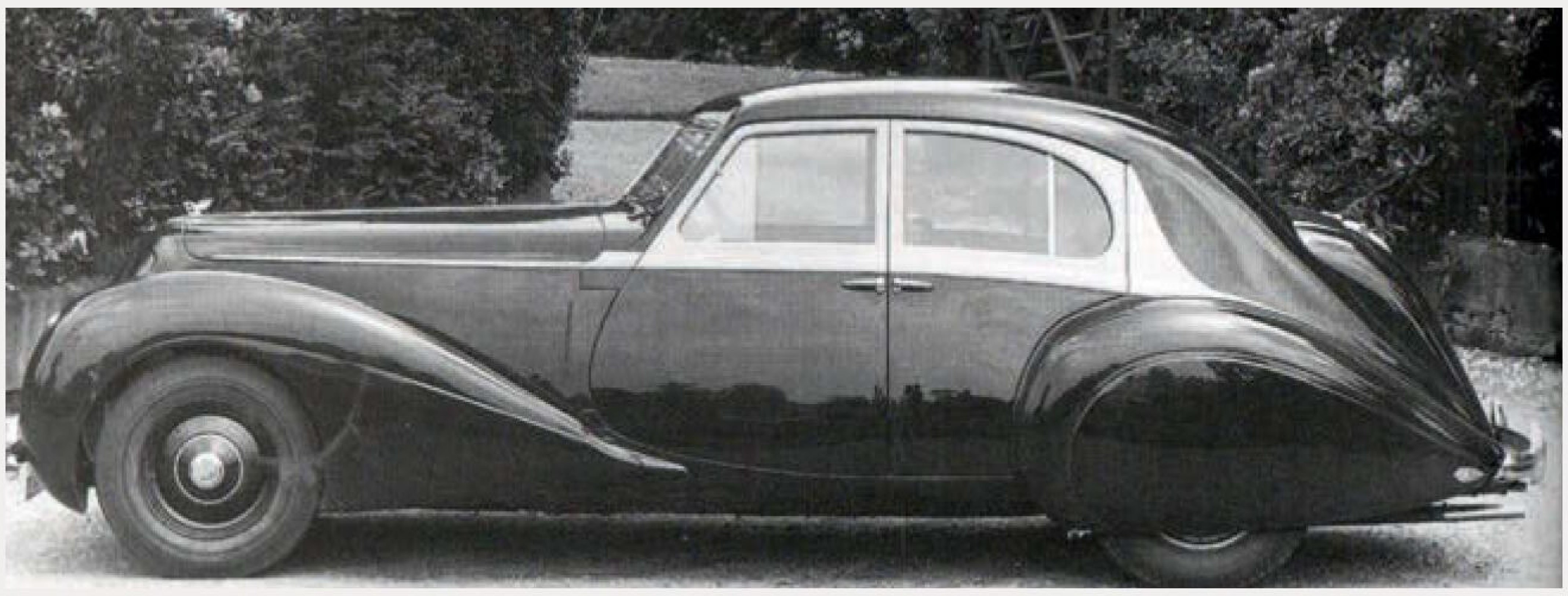
Readily appealing as a sporting car with Rolls-Royce quality, the 3½ Litre sold well from the off, despite complaints from die-hard worshippers of the vintage Bentley's traditional "bloody thump", who considered the new car rather soft and refused to have anything to do with it. But the popular Brooklands racing driver, Bira (actually Prince Birabongse of Siam, who drove the likes of MG Magnette, ERA and Delage on track), and his cousin Prince Chula, set a good example by having no such objections as early customers.

No car is perfect, of course, as W.O. discovered on continental test runs in another of his sinecures as technical adviser to the managing director. He found its front-end chassis flexing to be "unbearable on bad pave", while wind resistance closed up the radiator shutters in fast cruising, causing overheating; and although the servo worked well, the brakes themselves faded alarmingly after extended use.

That flexing frame inflicted front axle tramp, forcing the adoption of Wilmot-Breeden Harmonic Stabiliser bumpers with lead weights at each end to damp out the tremors. Initially, these blades were too flimsily attached, as marque » dealer Jack Barclay found when his demonstration car's front bumper fell off, unsettling it enough to turn over. This wouldn't have happened with the Bugatti Type 57's stronger chassis and independent front suspension; in fact, Barrie Price, motoring author and restoration specialist in both marques, went so far as to say that the Bugatti's steering and roadholding were "vastly superior". Nevertheless, W.O. remained gracious about the car that bore his name but not his designer's input, describing it as "light and easy to handle", as well as having "the best gearbox – with synchromesh – that Rolls-Royce had ever produced". He went on to say: "All that it seriously lacked was independent suspension at the front, and really fade-free brakes".

Testing the 3½ Litre was to be W.O.'s swansong with Rolls-Royce. He had just completed his obligatory three-year stint with the company when, coinciding with his contract coming up for renewal, he was invited by Lagonda to be its technical director. The company was up for sale at that time, with (ironically) Rolls-Royce interested in buying it. But when Lagonda was sold instead to Lincoln's Inn solicitor, Alan Good, W.O. saw it as his ticket out, joining the firm's design team at Staines and working on an improved 4½-litre Alvis and the new V12 engine.

The offices may have been ramshackle, with W.O. dive-bombed by spiders from the leaking corrugated iron roof, but it was still a welcome new experience: "After the diversions and anxieties of Bentley Motors, the frustrations and politics of Rolls-Royce… I felt quite lightheaded with the sense of freedom". Not only



The Bentley Corniche was originally meant to be unveiled at the 1939 Earl's Court Motor Show.

CORNICHE RECREATION

The project to recreate the one-off Bentley Corniche of 1939 was started some years ago by volunteers from the W.O. Bentley Memorial Foundation and the Sir Henry Royce Memorial Foundation. Bentley Motors subsequently took over the project at the start of 2018, the aim being to complete the car in time for Bentley's official centenary the following year.

Many of the parts originally produced to make further Corniche models were kept at Crewe until the early 1970s before being sold off to specialists and enthusiasts. Then in 2001, automotive historian and former Bentley director Ken Lea decided to embark upon a recreation of the Corniche, with volunteers helping to gather information and original parts in order to assemble the chassis.

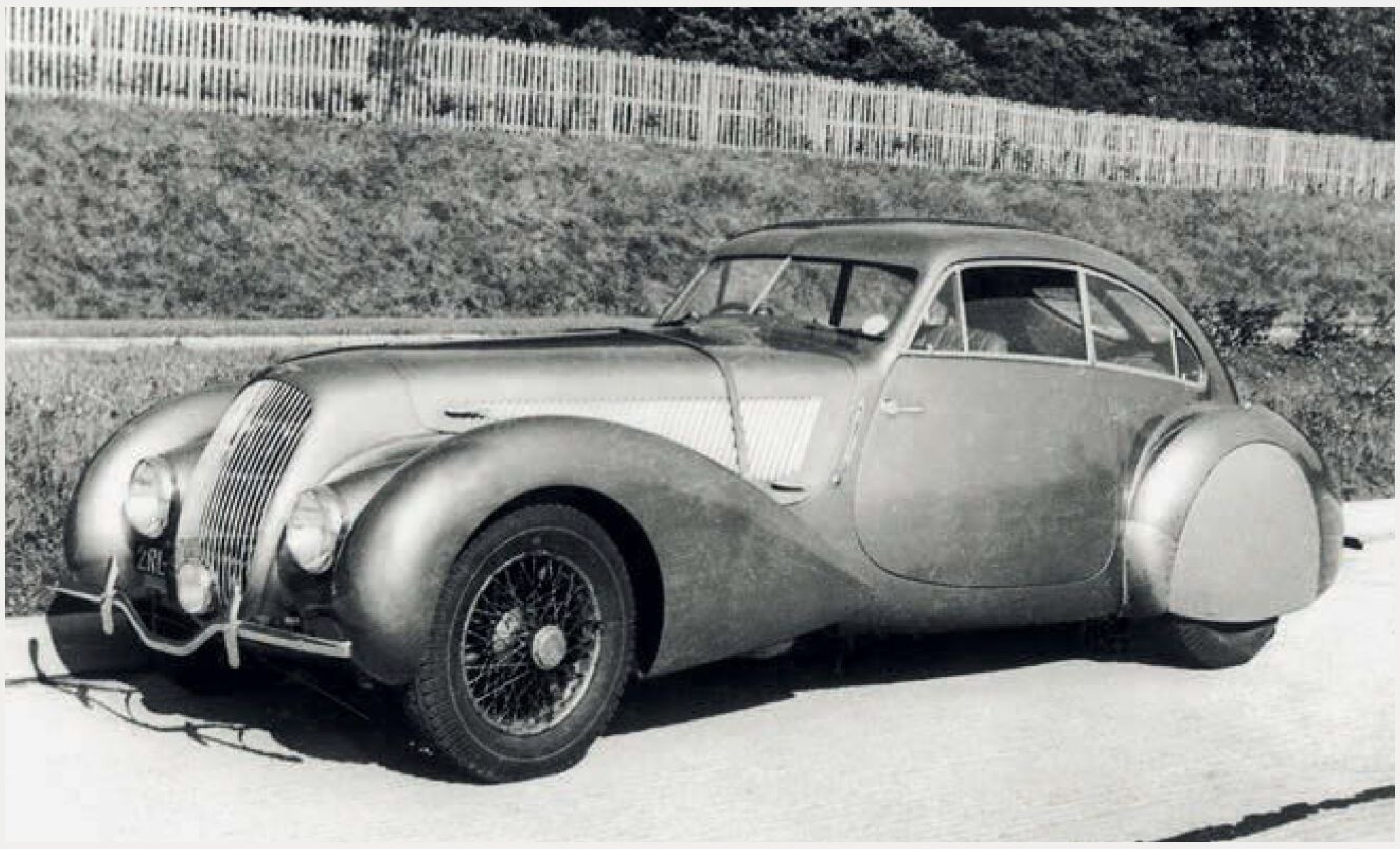
Seven years later, with the project struggling for money, Bentley Motors offered to provide an injection of funds, which meant that work could start on the ash frame and aluminium bodywork using the expertise of Hampshire-based coachbuilders, Ashley & James. The body was created from the outline drawings given to the project by the family of the car's original designer, George Paulin.

The project continued to make slow progress, however, and was finally brought in-house to the Mulliner division of Bentley Motors at the request of then chairman and CEO, Adrian Hallmark. A team of four was put in place to oversee the 'new' Corniche, a line-up that comprised Ken Lea, Robin Peel (head of Heritage), Ian Broomhall (Mulliner's operations manager) and Glyn Davies (special projects leader).

The end result was a stunning recreation of a pre-war prototype Bentley, with meticulous attention to detail throughout. The Corniche is now on permanent display at Crewe as part of Bentley Motors' prized Heritage Collection.

that, W.O.'s work on the Lagonda V12 involved him in Le Mans again, with the two team cars achieving third and fourth place in 1939.

> "With three cars shown to the press in September 1933, deliveries of the 3½ Litre began early the following year"


The streamlined Embiricos Bentley was a one-off extensively tested by Rolls-Royce.

Announced in September 1933, the Bentley 3½ Litre proved commercially successful.

BIGGER CAPACITY

As the 3½ Litre's production run continued, the usual increase in weight imposed by coachbuilders led to an upgrade in engine size in 1936. Although the new 4¼-litre engine was torquier, performance stayed about the same thanks to accumulated weight, and it was considered a slightly rougher unit than previously. But of greater concern by this time were reports of owners losing oil pressure and ruining their big ends on the new German autobahns, after prolonged spells of flat-out driving.

Treated reasonably, the Bentley's mechanicals were durable enough. At Brooklands, cars could lap at 88mph in full touring trim and reach a maximum safe limit of 4500rpm (and 93mph) on the standard axle. Fine for the no-option nature of winding, single-carriageway British roads, and even on French routes nationales, where the presence of boxy little Rosengarts and Citroën camionettes overflowing with *haricots verts* interrupted maximum speed bursts. But on the Reich's autobahns, running at 95mph indefinitely was causing the revs to go to 5000, with oil temperatures exceeding 100˚C. Hardly ideal when, in Barrie Price's opinion, the thickness of the white-metal big ends was already questionable, allied to a build-up of crankcase heat in an engine of modest sump capacity.

The works' solution for intending autobahners was to offer a higher axle ratio. But once the owner returned to English road conditions, he'd then be complaining of having to change gear more often. Something had to be done to maintain the Bentley's reputation as one of the fastest touring cars on the road, said Robotham. And so for 1938, not only was an overdrive 'box – a four-speeder with an indirect top – introduced for the standard 4¼ Litre, but serious thought was given to the production of a lighter, higher-performance model.

As it happened, a special order received by Rolls-Royce's Paris branch provided the ideal basis for a design study. It had come from wealthy Greek racing driver André Embiricos, who had asked for a lightweight two-door aerodynamic coupé. Walter Sleator, the agent, commissioned noted designer Georges Paulin to evolve a wind-cheating shape, to be constructed of Duralumin by French coachbuilder Pourtout. 'Le Streamline' was ready by January 1939, and though it caused twitchings among the Derby top brass, Robotham felt it would provide an excellent opportunity to show that Bentley was more than ready for Europe's fast new roads.

Embiricos obligingly put the car at the disposal of a Rolls-Royce team, who assessed it on various routes through France and Germany. Three hundredweight (152kg) lighter than the standard 4¼ Litre saloon, 'Le Streamline' devoured conventional routes nationales at an average 87mph, »

Deliveries of the 'Standard Steel' MkVI began in October 1946.

The R-Type of 1952-on was a development of the MkVI, with useful updates.

and managed 112mph for five minutes on a treacherously icy autobahn. Shortly after, Sleator took it around Montlhéry and managed over 114 miles in the hour before returning the car to its owner, nicely run in. The Embiricos car then lived on, coming sixth in the 1949 Le Mans event – by which time it had 60,000 miles on its odometer.

CORNICHE CALAMITY

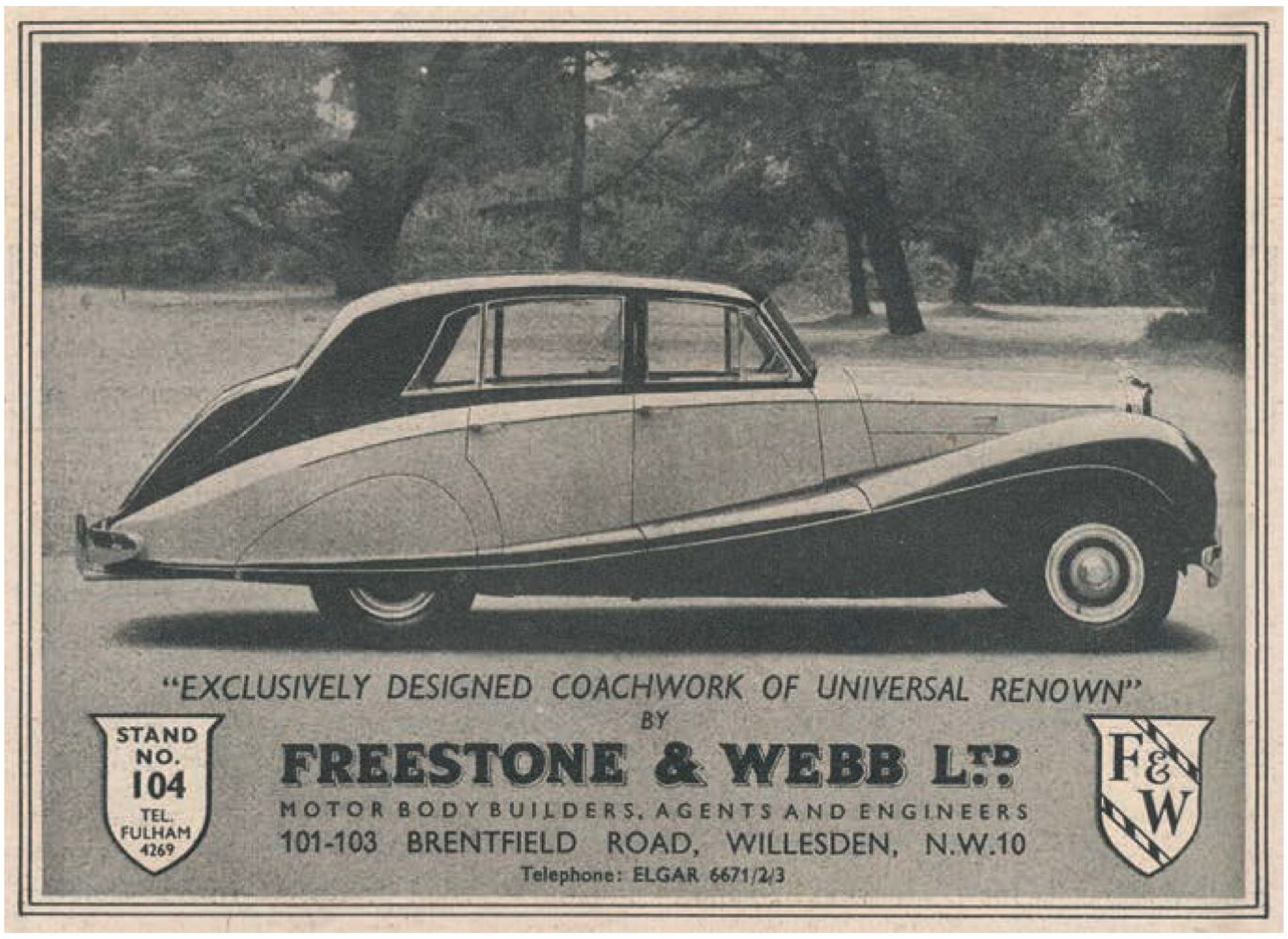
The publicity generated by the Embiricos project prompted many enquiries for a production model. Using experience gained from 'Le Streamline', Derby's Ivan Evernden was set to work on a concept named Corniche, in consultation with Georges Paulin and Parisian coachbuilder Van Vooren. It was scheduled for display at 1939's Earl's Court Motor Show alongside the new Bentley MkV, a much-improved 4¼ Litre featuring independent front suspension, whose chassis the Corniche shared in lightened form.

Robotham regretted the insistence on four doors for the concept: "When completed, the Corniche was nearer the standard Bentley than the Embiricos in weight. Nevertheless, it had a very lively performance and a top speed of about 110mph". Aerodynamics again predominated, although the overall aesthetic effect this time was slightly bizarre – a mixture of contemporary French panache with a Detroit-style front end reminiscent of a Lincoln-Zephyr and a '39 Hudson.

Bizarre or not, plans were laid for production and in the summer of 1939 the first car was ready for continental trials in company with 'Big Bertha', a straight-eight Rolls-Royce limousine prototype. It was a difficult time politically to be going abroad, but Robotham wanted to get in as much European testing as possible before the international situation worsened. Apart from throwing tyre treads at 110mph on the autobahn, the Corniche acquitted itself well, also proving that it could scale mountain roads free of fuel-vapour lock and descend without brake fade.

Fate then took a hand, although stories tend to differ at this point. One account has the Corniche twice suffering accident damage, culminating in the body having to come off for repair in France, the chassis being returned to England and the repaired body – whilst awaiting shipment – being destroyed by enemy action at the docks. Yet Robotham, one of those closest to the Corniche project, makes no mention of this in his memoirs. According to him, the 'Big Bertha' limousine crew completed their own test programme and set off for home, leaving Ivan Waller with the Corniche to collect new tyres from Cannes airport and continue with high-speed trials. By the time Waller was instructed by Robotham to return, hostilities had arrived so fast that he had to leave the Corniche behind on the quayside before boarding the ferry at Dieppe. Shortly after, the RAC sent on the keys but not the car: it had sustained a direct hit from a bomb.

Whichever was the true account, the project was dead. The Corniche would


"EXCLUSIVELY DESIGNED COACHWORK OF UNIVERSAL RENOWN"
BY
FREESTONE & WEBB LTD
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F & W

The R-Type chassis was popular with coachbuilders, as shown in this early advert.

Among the coachbuilt R-Types was this Empress-style Freestone & Webb offering.

A special order received by Rolls-Royce's Paris branch provided the ideal basis for a design study"

be reinstated only in name, and then not until the Silver Shadow generation of two-door models inherited it in 1971.

MkVI SUCCESS

The Second World War obviously stifled Bentley's plans for 1940, with the Corniche stillborn and only eleven MkVs produced. Initially the Chassis Department – now relocated to Belper – busied itself with speculative proposals for a rationalised post-war range, including a small car and even a tractor. But priorities shifted to tank development until it was considered appropriate to resume car matters in 1944, concentrating then on the new Bentley MkVI.

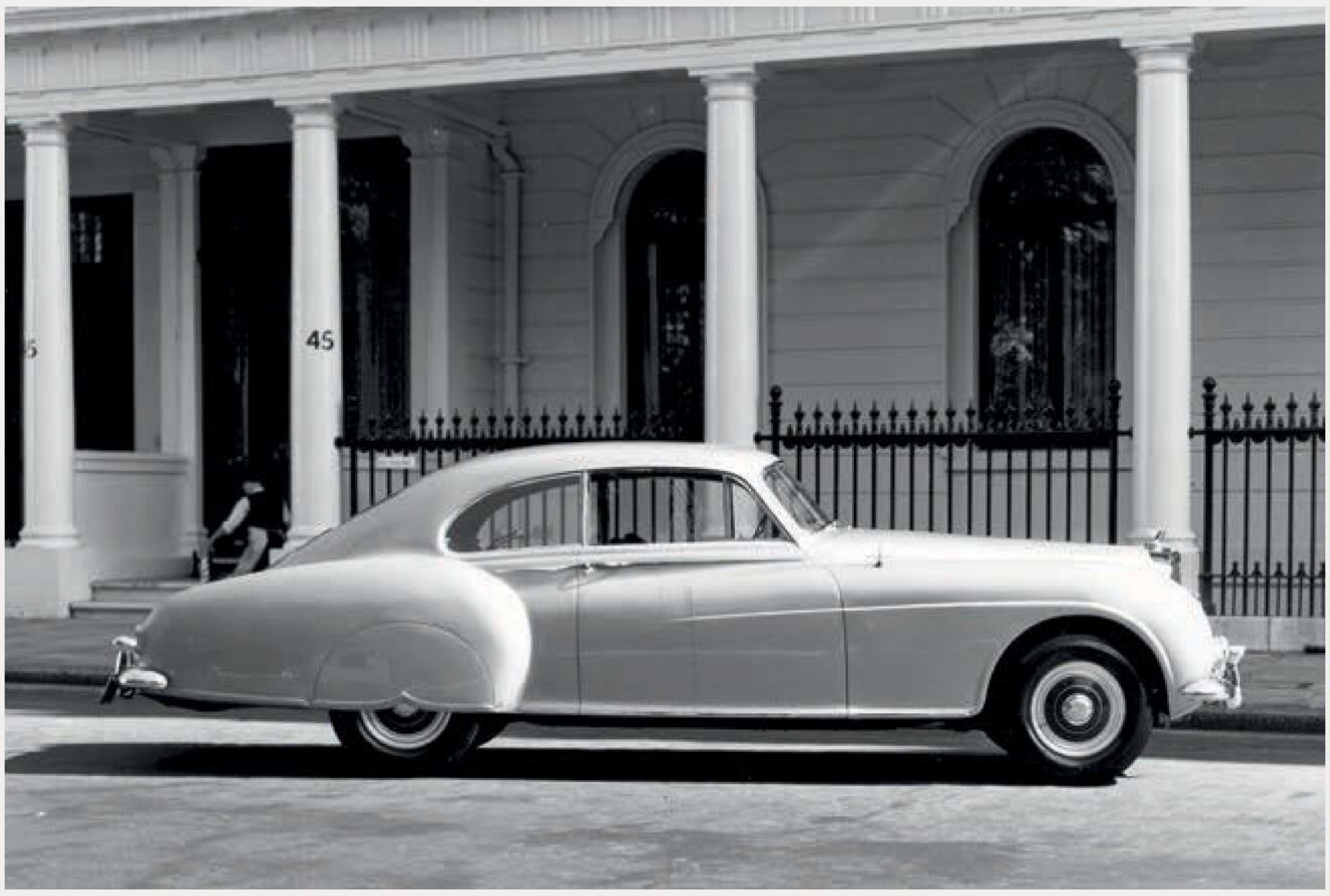
The proposed MkVI used much MkV content, but with a shortened wheelbase and generally simplified throughout – "much the better for it", opined Barrie Price – for easier production (newly transplanted to Crewe). The engine remained at 4257cc but now specified an overhead-inlet and side-exhaust head, allowing a suitable combustion shape for good turbulence and smoothness. Departing from normal Rolls-Royce and Bentley practice, and anticipating austere peacetime years ahead with a declining coachbuilding industry, the car was offered with a single off-the-peg body produced by Pressed Steel at Cowley, with finishing, trimming and mounting then carried out at Crewe. Chassis were still made available to coachbuilders, however, for those Bentley clients who demanded – and could afford – extra exclusivity.

Known as the 'Standard Steel' Bentley, deliveries began in October 1946, with the Maharajah of Baroda taking the first one. It was the right car at the right time, its understated but tasteful looks and unostentatious radiator providing well-heeled owners with a welcome anonymity in a more »

The Silver Dawn was the first Rolls-Royce to be derived from a Bentley, in this case the MkVI.

egalitarian-conscious post-war world. The car remained unchanged in appearance for six years, save for cutaway rear-wheel spats and chrome waist strips in September 1948, and scuttle vents and larger hubcaps from late 1951, by which time engine size was increased to 4566cc with a twin-exhaust system. This final MkVI was to be referred to retrospectively in the trade as the 'Big Bore, Small Boot' to distinguish it from the longer R-Type that arrived in October 1952.

The MkVI was well liked. It was the most rigidly-constructed British car of the period, could do over 90mph with ease, and the new gearbox designed for it was silky and precise.


The most advanced looking coachbuilt R-Types were the sensationally svelte Continentals.

BENTLEY
ARMSTRONG SIDDELEY
DAIMLER
DODGE DeSoto
PANHARD
Bentley had an eye-catching presence at the 1953 Earl's Court Motor Show.

The car's worst enemy over time was rust in the rear body, sills and spot-welded sidelamp housings, while the by-pass oil filter system used up to 1951 could cause havoc with the main bearings. But the engines were so well designed, said Barrie Price, "that they remained amazingly smooth, even when the crankshaft was badly scored with bearings worn right through the thin-wall white-metal lining". And when the time did come for major overhaul, the convenient quick-release front wing and radiator assembly maximised accessibility.

Erstwhile Bentley Drivers Club president, Stanley Sedgwick, certainly loved his 1952 'Big Bore': "It was fast, safe, comfortable and a joy to drive; versatile, equally at home shopping, commuting, towing, touring and all-in-all just about the best compromise one could wish for".

ROLLS-ROYCE VERSION

To satisfy export orders to countries such as the USA (where Bentley was less well-known), a Rolls-Royce Silver Dawn version was introduced in July 1949. This was more or less identical to the MkVI, save for the Rolls-Royce radiator and a column change; but acknowledging traditional Rolls-Royce reserve, the twin SU carburettors were replaced by a single Stromberg, which Robotham felt "gave more consistent

W.O. Bentley left Rolls-Royce to join Alvis, giving him a new-found sense of freedom.

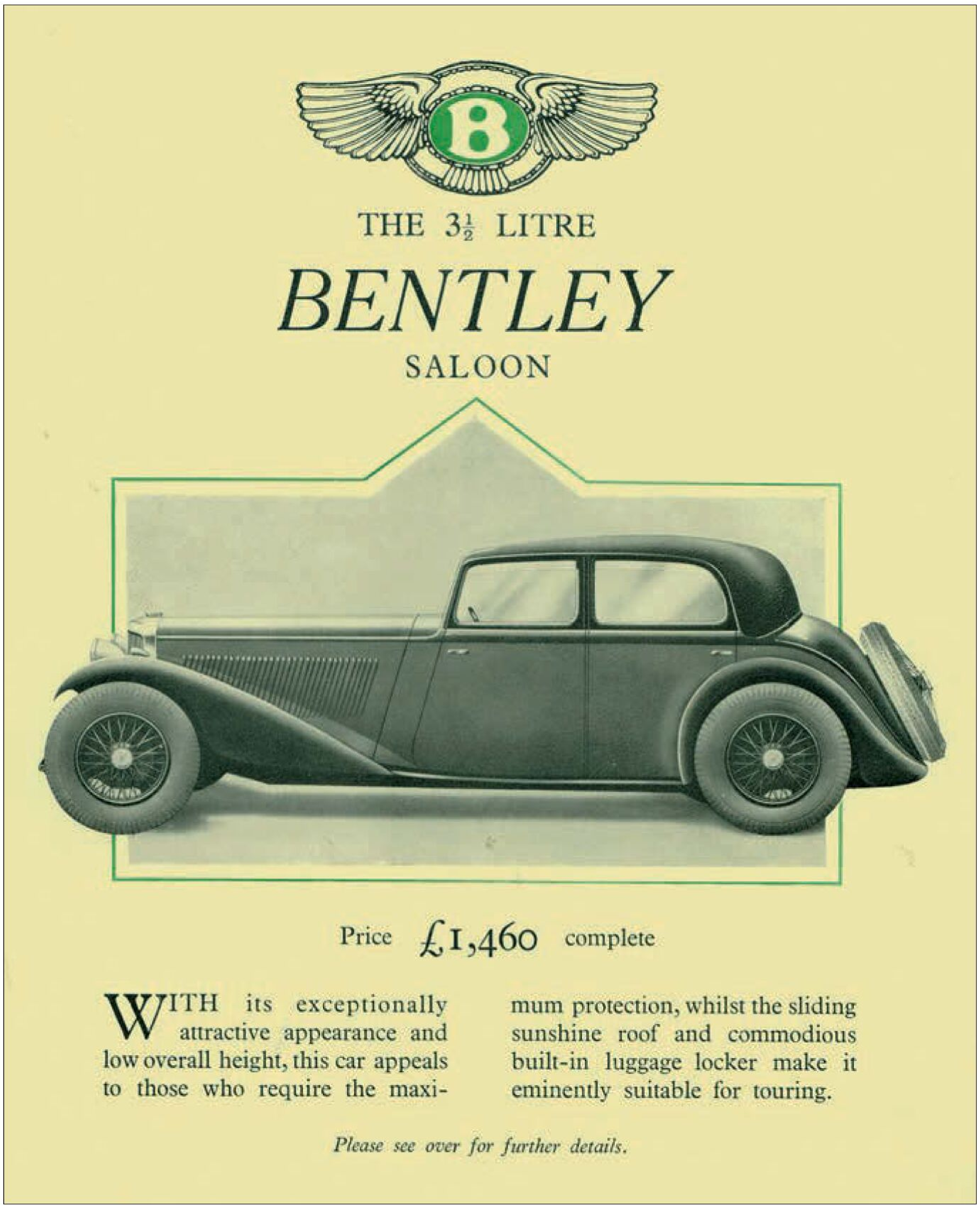
slow-running”. The Dawn wasn’t made available on the British market until October 1953, by which time it had adopted the R-Type’s silhouette.

The 1952-55 R-Type itself was a further refinement of the MkVI brew, featuring a more graceful tail that added seven and a half inches to the overall length and contributed another hundredweight (51kg) to the bulk, a new lightweight aluminium fuel tank notwithstanding. The dual-exhaust system was simplified, screen demisting improved, and the spare wheel gained a profiled tray under the boot floor. It was the first Bentley to be offered with a four-speed Hydramatic gearbox, which proved generally trouble-free at the slight expense of fuel consumption and performance. However, the discriminating Price felt that without the manual version’s heavy flywheel, the engine was slightly rougher and that “the tendency to jolt in the second-to-third gear upchange was never entirely eliminated”.

Be that as it may, the R-Type was one of the most handsome cars to come out of Crewe, alongside an even greater beauty of the period, the 1952-54 R-Type Mulliner Continental – the work of chief project engineer Ivan Evernden, with John Blatchley assisting. Although interpreted as a reborn Corniche, it was much closer in spirit to Embiricos car, albeit with more luxurious room for four in its two-door, fastback coupé body panelled in light alloy. A higher-compression head and higher final drive raised maximum speed to 117 mph, and it was supplemented by a Park Ward version in September 1954, when both models received the bigger 4887cc engine in advance of the S-series’ and Silver Cloud’s introduction the following April.

Automatic was also offered on the Continentals from late 1954; in which case, Price declared, you chose between the manual transmission juddering on take-off because of the higher gearing, or masking it with a system that didn’t “suit the personality” of the car. But in the Mulliner Continental’s original, purest form, *The Autocar* magazine struck the right note when it said: “This Bentley is a modern magic carpet which annihilates distance and delivers the occupants well-nigh as fresh as when they started. It is a car Britain may well be proud of, and is sure to add new lustre to the name it bears”.

> **“The proposed MkVI used much MkV content, but with a shortened wheelbase and generally simplified throughout”**


THE 3½ LITRE

BENTLEY

SALOON

Price £1,460 complete

WITH its exceptionally attractive appearance and low overall height, this car appeals to those who require the maximum protection, whilst the sliding sunshine roof and commodious built-in luggage locker make it eminently suitable for touring.

Please see over for further details.

This advert for the 3½ Litre saloon described it as “eminently suitable for touring”.

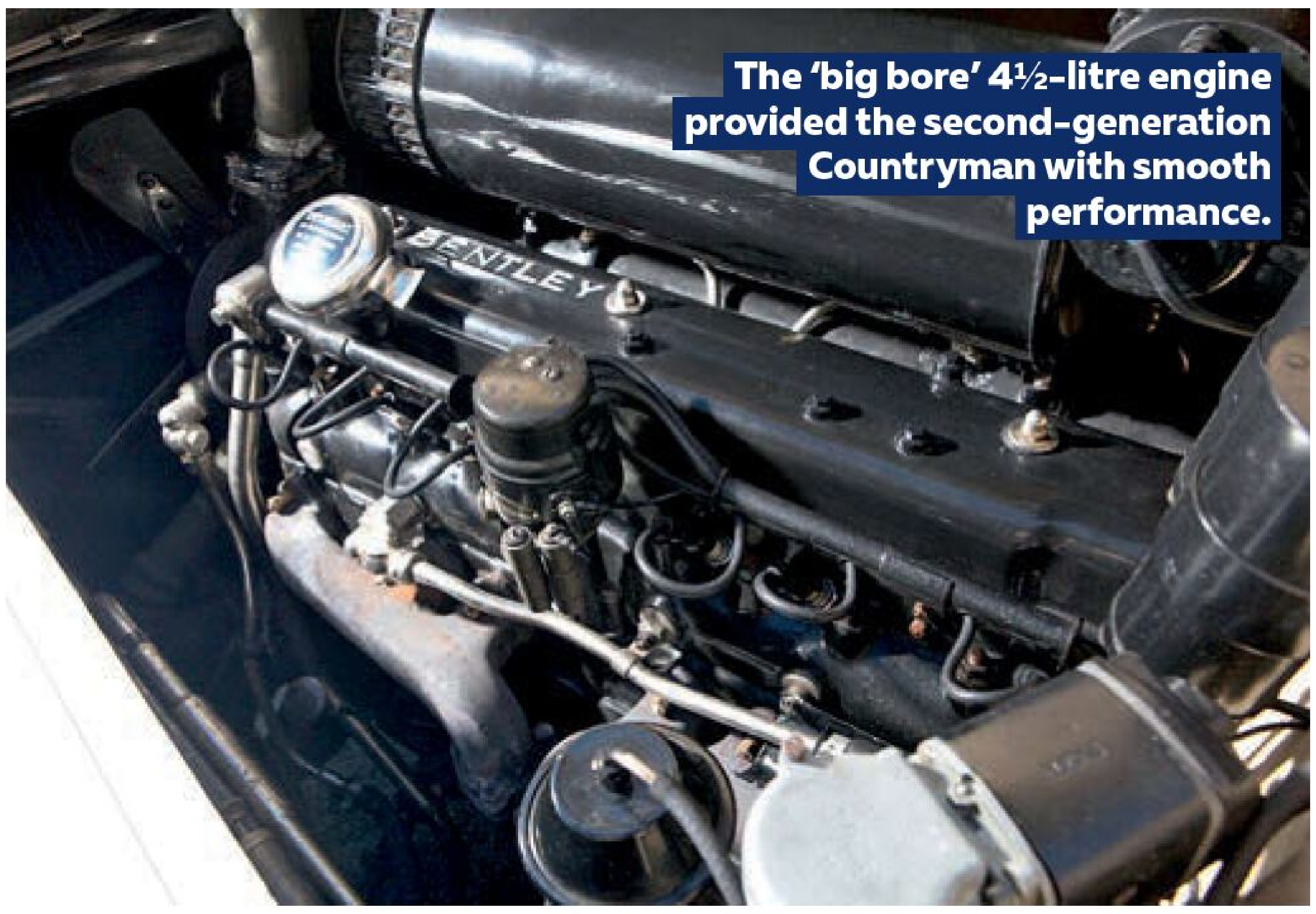
Taking 1955 as our cut-off point for this section, some may argue that the post-war sharing of standard bodies with Rolls-Royce models had caused Bentley’s identity to suffer. Nevertheless, Bentleys continued to outnumber their Rolls-Royce clones significantly – thus maintaining more frequent street presence – until well into the S-series stage. The tide only turned with the S2 of 1959-62, when short- and long-wheelbase standard Silver Cloud II production exceeded the Bentley’s by 29 per cent. And for the next couple of decades, export policy and changing buying habits determined that the Rolls-Royce image flourished at the expense of Bentley’s. Indeed, it wouldn’t be until the arrival of the Mulsanne Turbo and its successors of the ’80s that we would finally see a resurgence of the Bentley identity of old. ■

COUNTRY ESTATE

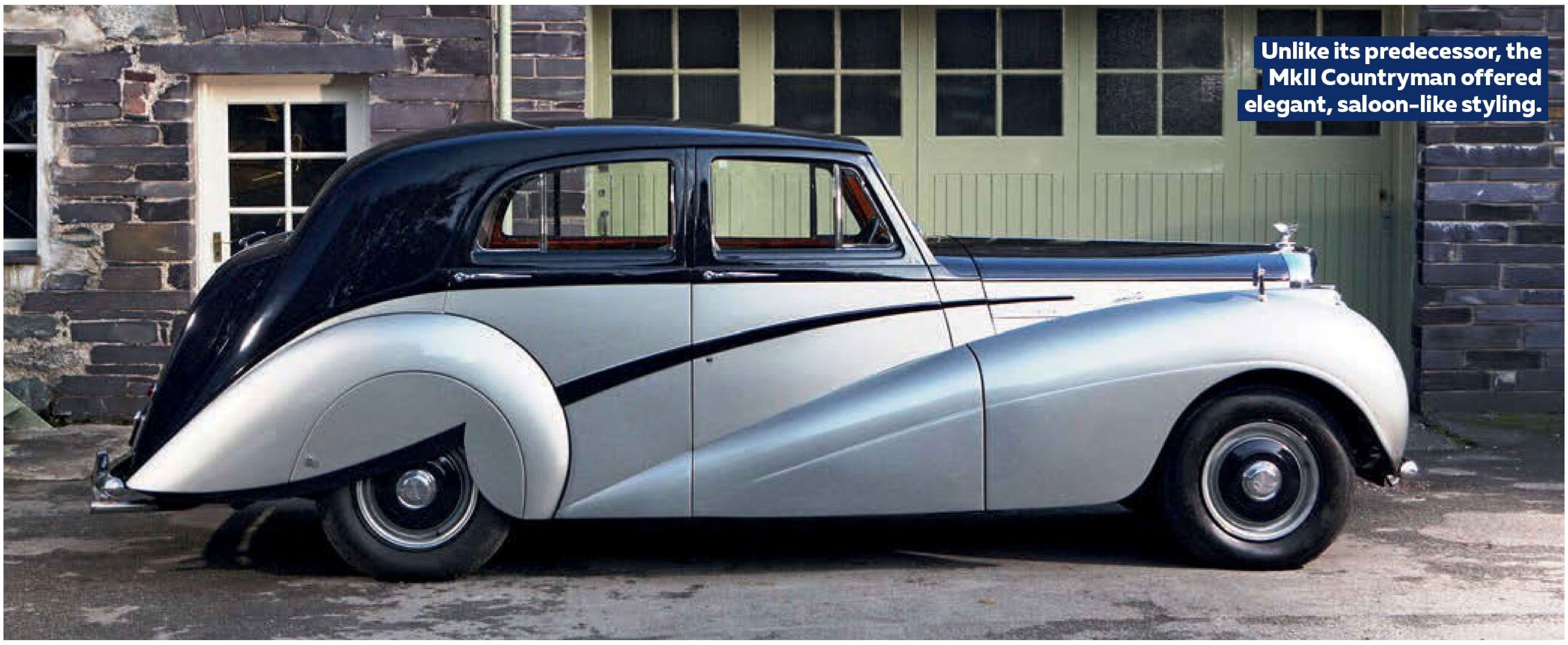
One of just nine examples built, this Bentley MkVI-based second-generation Countryman was Radford's own motor show car prior to being entered in the 1954 Monte Carlo Rally

BENTLEY MOTORS 1931 LTD.
16 CONDUIT ST. LONDON
CHASSIS NO

Chassis number B40MD was the very first MkII Countryman built by Radford.



The 'big bore' 4½-litre engine provided the second-generation Countryman with smooth performance.



Unlike its predecessor, the MkII Countryman offered elegant, saloon-like styling.

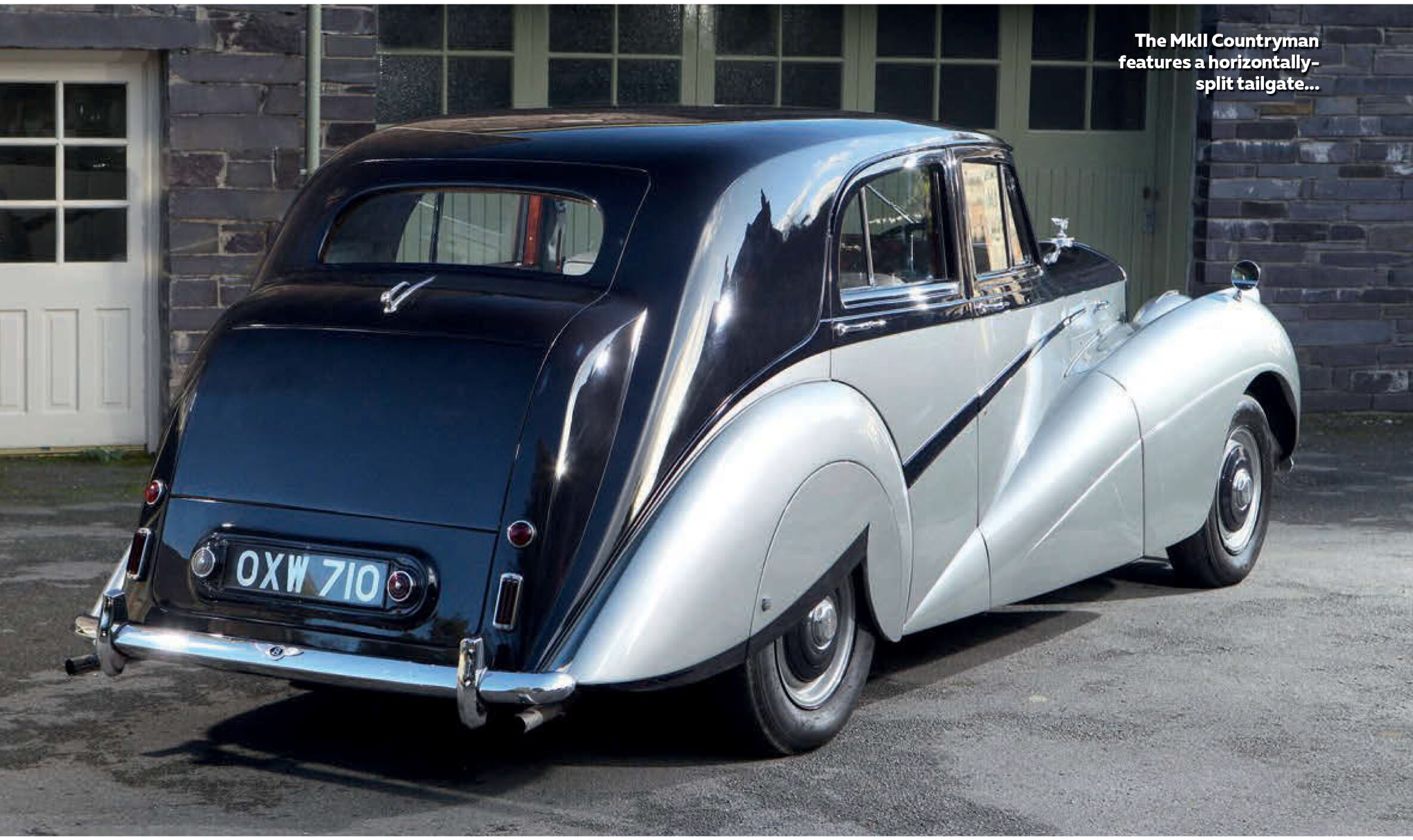
The Bentley MkVI marked a major change of direction for the marque, its availability in 'Standard Steel' guise being a first for the company. Previous Bentley (and Rolls-Royce) models had relied on Britain's independent coachbuilders for their bodywork, with rolling chassis being supplied to the trade before being offered with an array of intriguing body style options. With the MkVI, however, Bentley was able to supply its customers with complete cars straight from the factory, a policy that proved popular with buyers seeking a well-equipped modern saloon.

The MkVI went on to be a major success for Bentley, with around 5200 examples built by the time it was usurped by the heavily updated R-Type in 1952. The vast majority of those cars were of the factory-built 'Standard Steel' variety, but among the coachbuilders offering special versions of the MkVI was Harold Radford, who converted an early example into an estate, badged as the Countryman and featuring distinctive wood-panelled bodywork from the A-pillars back. As author Martyn Nutland explains in his Veloce-published book dedicated to the Bentley MkVI, the Countryman was a "car for the country gentleman, a vaguely Wodehouse-esque eccentric who would have had friends called Psmith and Stiffy Byng, and a chauffeur nicknamed Grapes".

The quality of the conversion was impressive enough for Rolls-Royce to officially recognise Hammersmith-based Harold Radford Coachbuilding Ltd as a specialist coachbuilder, with that initial MkVI-derived Countryman being displayed at the 1948 Earl's Court Motor Show. There was no shortage of interest in Radford's transformation of the MkVI, leading to nine examples of the first-generation model being commissioned. The Countryman's alloy panels were clad with oak or beech trim and offered with a choice of mahogany or walnut veneer at the rear, giving the appearance of a wooden-bodied estate, while the horizontally-split rear tailgate opened to reveal a fully folding back seat and a generously proportioned load area. As an upmarket shooting brake for wealthy customers who enjoyed indulging in country pursuits, the Countryman was both neatly designed and well-targeted.

> "Not one to rest on his coachbuilding laurels, Radford unveiled a second-generation Countryman in 1951"

Not one to rest on his coachbuilding »



The MkII Countryman features a horizontally-split tailgate...

laurels, Harold Radford unveiled a second-generation MkVI-based Countryman in 1951, although this time he took an entirely different approach. The Radford-designed coachwork now followed the general shape of the MkVI, albeit with a horizontally-split rear tailgate where the bootlid of the 'Standard Steel' saloon would normally be. This was a fully-coachbuilt model, albeit one that didn't look as different from the regular MkVI as its forebear.

The first of the MkII Countryman models was unveiled in 1951, based around MkVI chassis number B40MD and still surviving to this day. It's the very same car that you see in the photographs, a superb survivor that was not only fully restored but managed to find itself a new home a few years ago and – at the time of our photo shoot – was about to set sail for its new home in the USA. It's the actual MkII Countryman that ended up being displayed at Britain's annual London-based motor show in both 1951 and '52, after which it went on an epic adventure thanks to its participation in the Monte Carlo Rally of 1954. And so, when it comes to provenance and historical significance, this is one Bentley MkVI that knows how to stand out from the crowd.

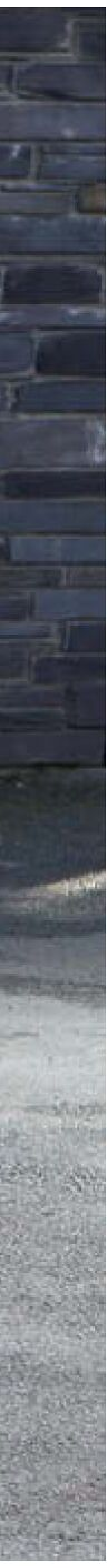
HISTORY LESSON

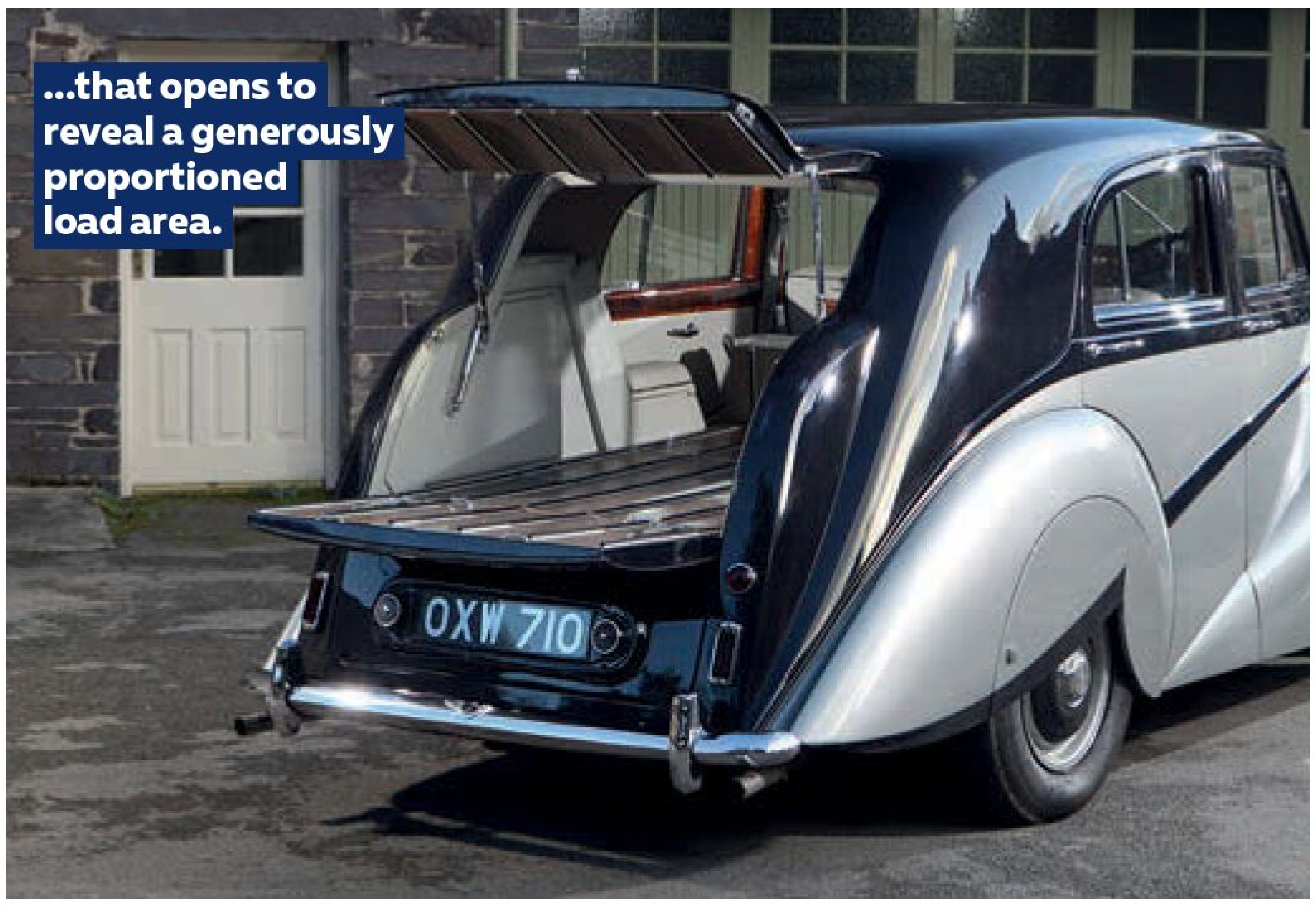
In his *Coachwork on Rolls-Royce & Bentley 1945-1965* book, James Taylor describes the official launch of the second-generation Radford Countryman: "Once again built on the Bentley MkVI chassis, the MkII Countryman was introduced to the public at the 1951 Earl's Court show by B40MD. This time the design was metal-panelled, and was a four-door saloon rather than a utility estate like the MkI."

The newcomer might have lost its predecessor's estate-like body style, but it was still a highly versatile and thoughtfully equipped addition to the market, with Taylor explaining that "the design incorporated picnic and other items carefully stowed in compartments within the body". The MkII Countryman was well-received at launch but, like the MkI, was always destined to be an exclusive offering, hence why once again a total of nine examples ended up being produced, the last of which was chassis number B495NY in February 1953. A MkIII Countryman then followed, inevitably based around the new Bentley R-Type, once again featuring a split tailgate despite the newcomer's extended boot line and unmistakeably saloon-shaped profile.

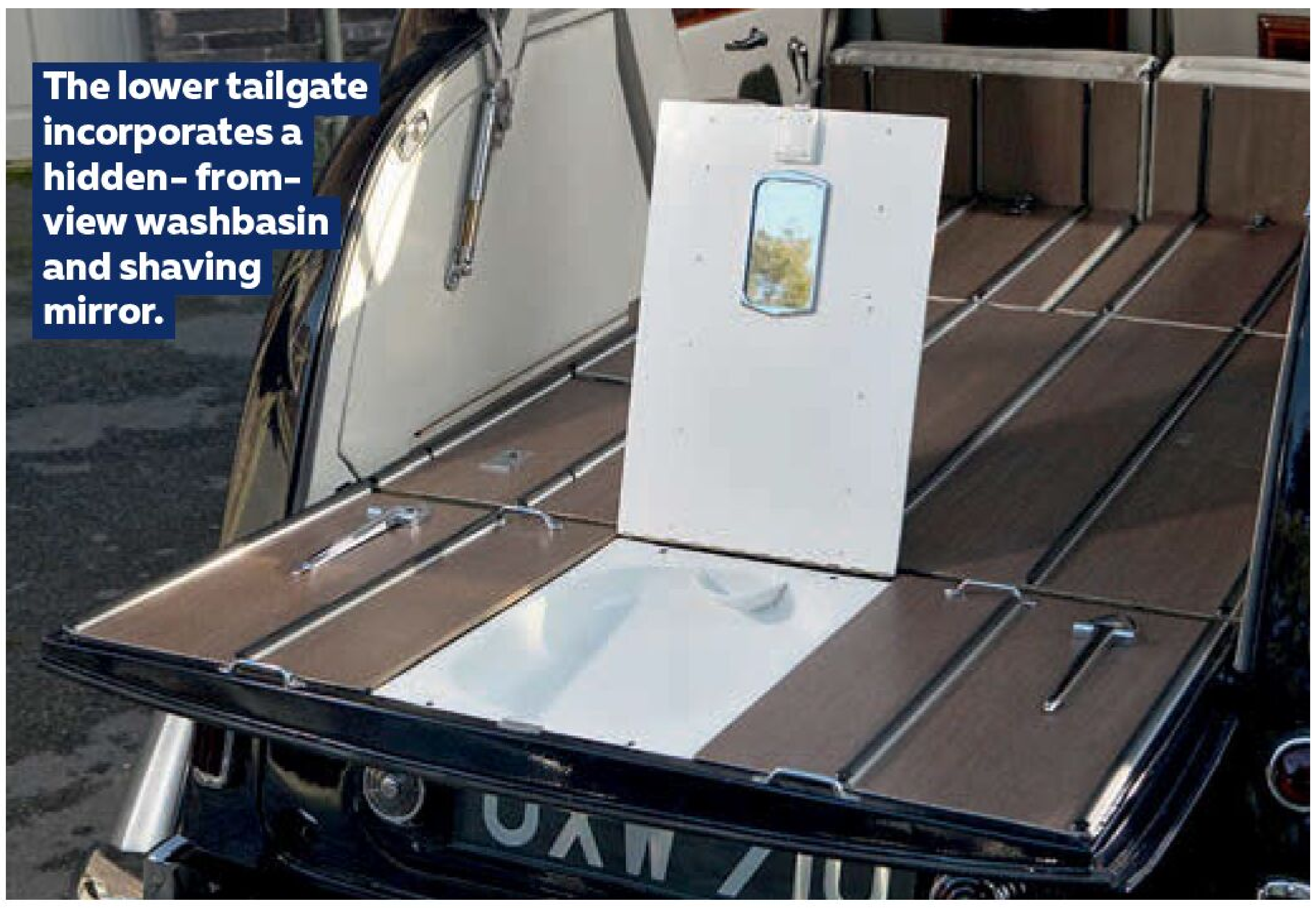
The fact that B40MD – the very first MkII Radford Countryman – still survives is a cause for celebration. This rare machine has been significantly restored to a high standard over the years, which explains why its history file contains bills and invoices totalling almost £200,000. These days, of course, the car is worth nowhere near such a figure, although a coachbuilt Radford will always be significantly more valuable than a 'Standard Steel' MkVI.

Our photo shoot took place at the Real Car Company, based in North Wales, shortly before the Radford's latest purchaser was about to have it shipped to North America, giving us a brief chance to experience it (and photograph it) before it left the UK. It was an opportunity we weren't going to miss, and our first impressions of the car didn't disappoint. With immaculate

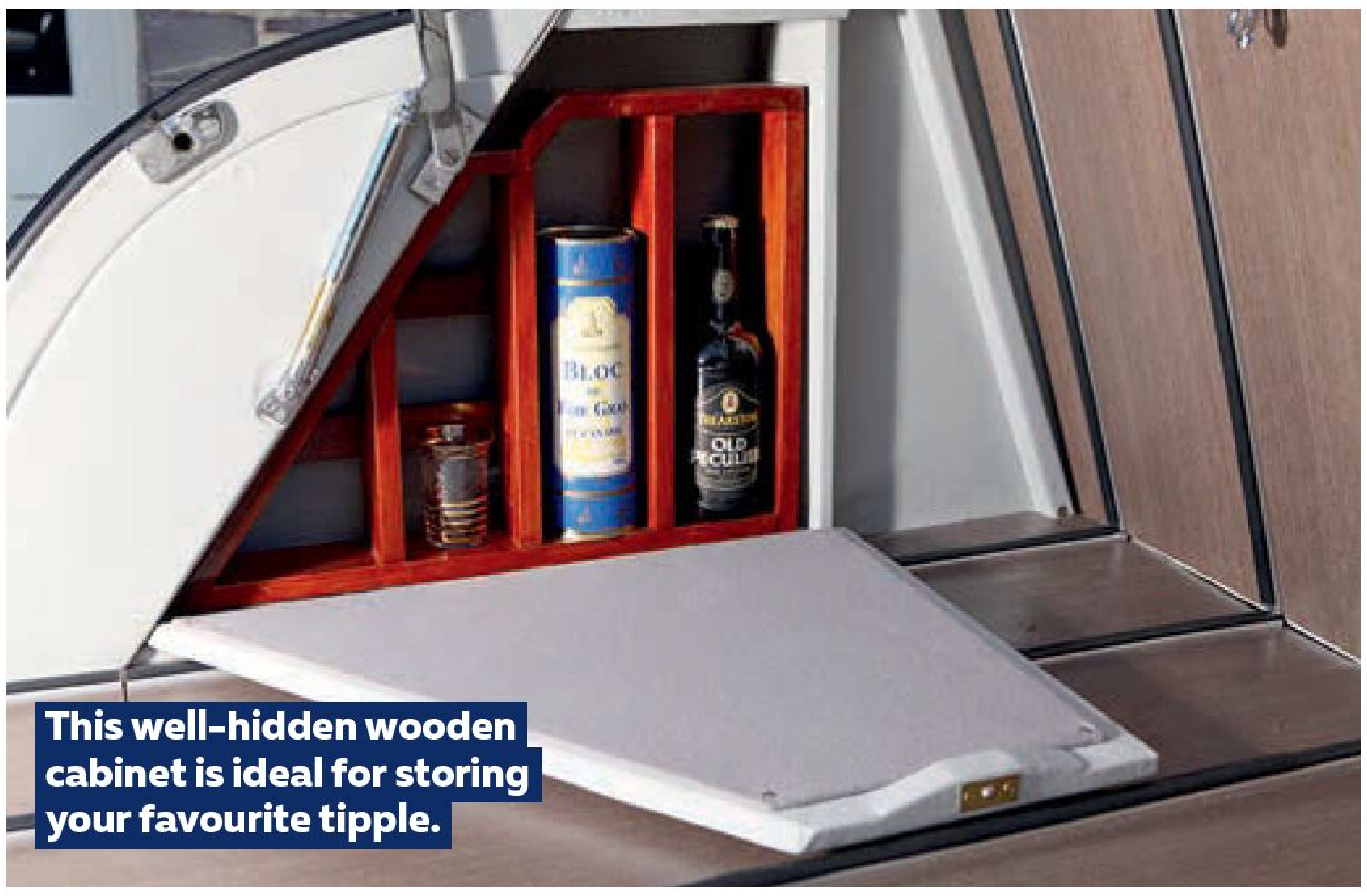




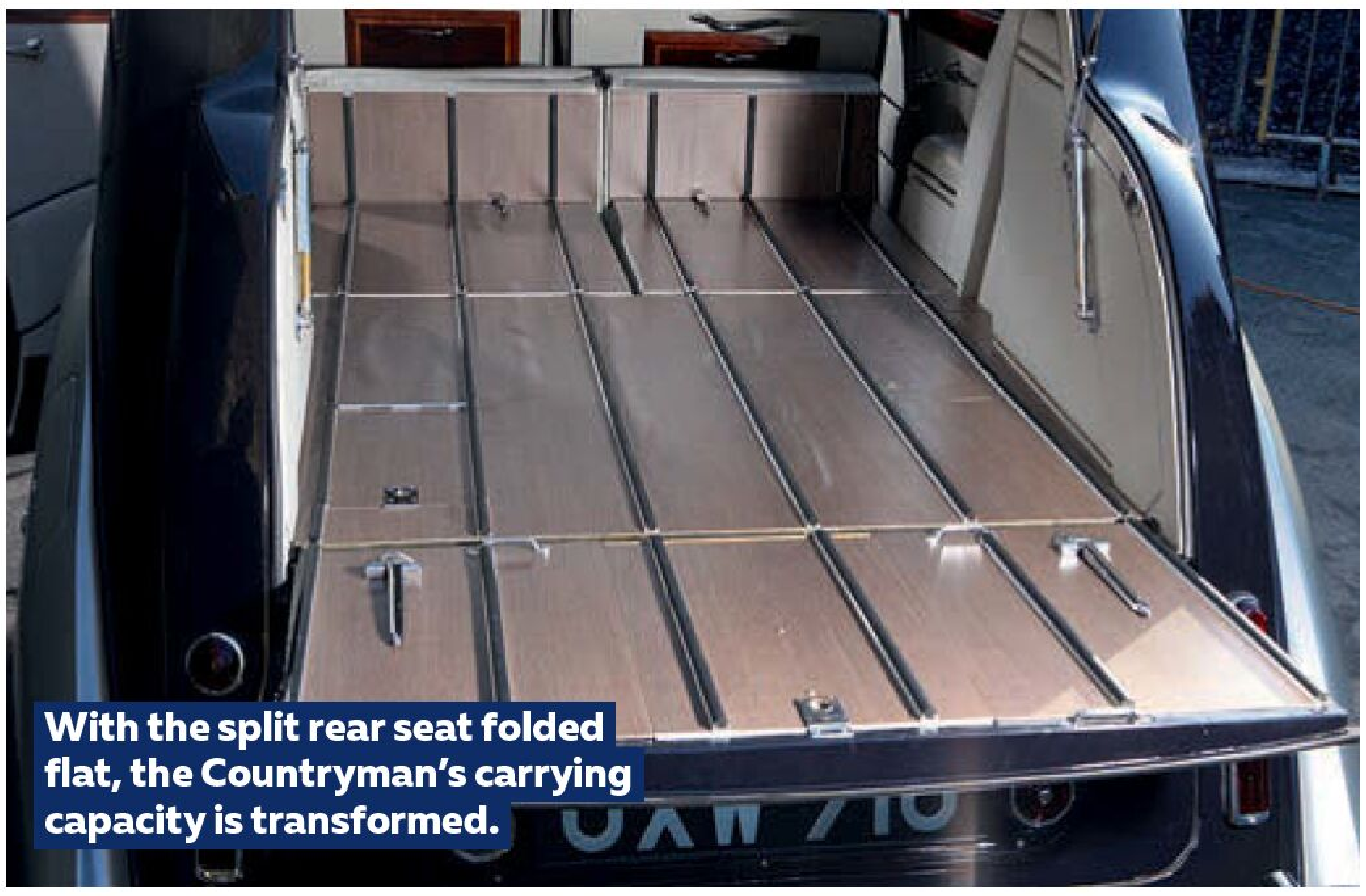
...that opens to reveal a generously proportioned load area.



The lower tailgate incorporates a hidden- from- view washbasin and shaving mirror.



This well-hidden wooden cabinet is ideal for storing your favourite tipple.



With the split rear seat folded flat, the Countryman's carrying capacity is transformed.

> "The fact that B40MD still survives is a cause for celebration, as is the car's current standard of presentation"

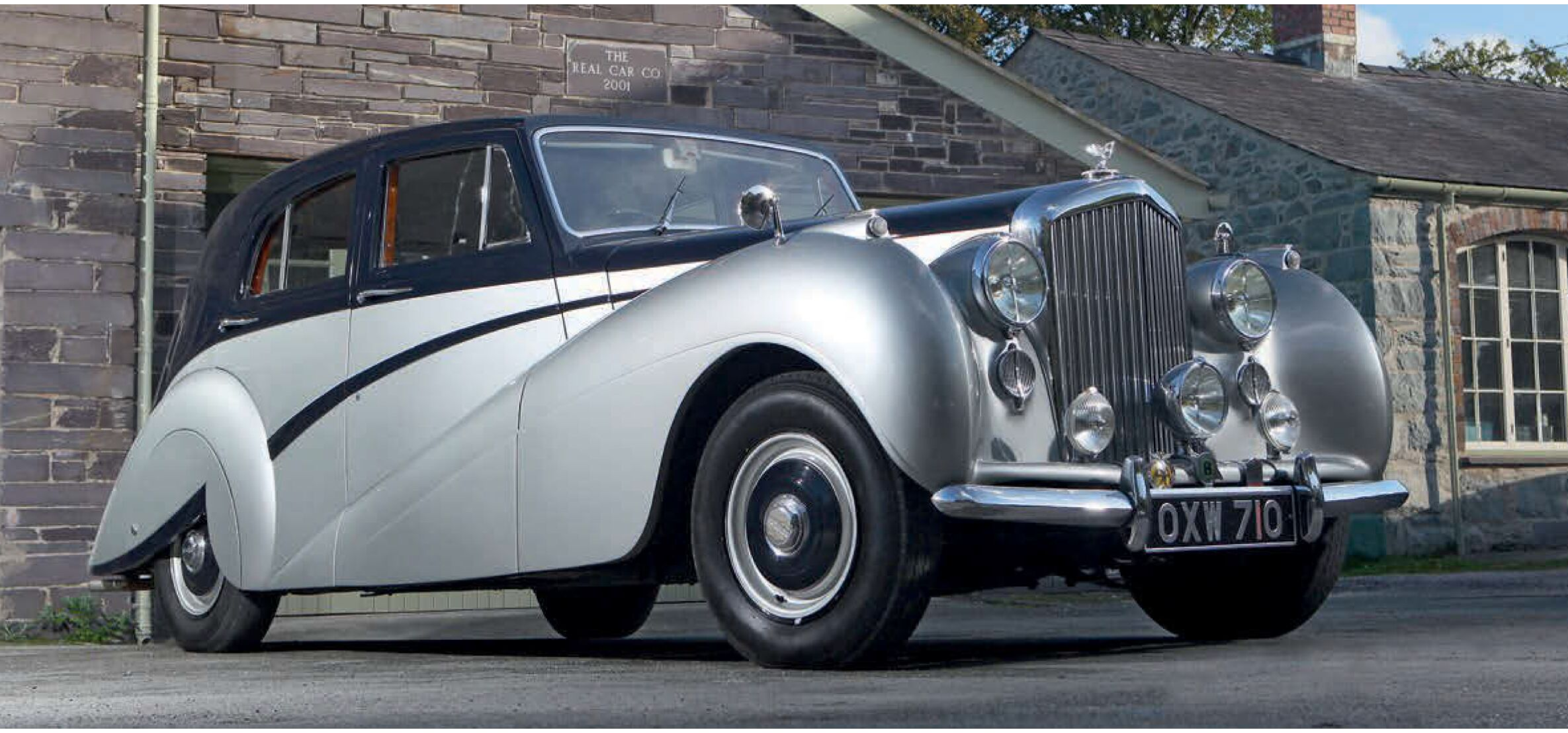
black paintwork to its upper body and silver below, broken up by a stylish black flash that sweeps down the car's flanks and around the base of the cutaway rear spats, it certainly isn't lacking in style, despite the fact that this was a Bentley built with practicality in mind.

The first clue of this comes at the rear, when the casual observer notices the shut-lines that run up the sides and across the top of the rear window. Then when we twist the chrome handle that sits on the curve of the boot, the uniqueness of the Radford conversion becomes obvious: the top half of the horizontally-split tailgate lifts upwards, allowing us to drop the lower part to form a continuation of the wonderfully level boot floor that features practical 'treads'. We're suddenly staring at a generously proportioned load area, one that can be made positively gargantuan simply by folding forward the split rear seat, with the backrest then extending the boot floor still further. This is a MkVI that looks like a saloon but, within just a couple of minutes, can be transformed into a load-swallowing machine with estate-like capability.

That's not all, though, as Harold Radford was a man of ingenuity when it came to detail touches. Not content with ensuring the MkII Countryman had a large rear opening and the potential for carrying hefty loads, he wanted to make sure his customers' needs were taken care of, whether they were enjoying a day out in the country or embarking upon some kind of grand tour. That's why when the bottom part of the tailgate is lowered to horizontal, the rearmost centre section can be lifted up to reveal a ceramic washbasin and built-in shaving mirror. The rear part of the load area also contains a hidden storage area on each side that's accessed by a fold-down panel, with one side featuring a wooden bottle carrier for your alcoholic tipple of choice and the other being ideal for essential foodstuffs.

On those occasions when the full-length load area isn't required and the back seat can be left in the usual upright position, the owner of the MkII Countryman can enjoy more pampering by sliding forward one of the built-in armrests found each side of the seat, inside which can be found the inevitable cut glass decanter and matching glasses – essential for celebrating that morning's successful shoot. Fold-out tables in the front seat backrests, meanwhile, provide even more comfort and convenience for anyone enjoying light refreshments in the rear of the car.

Such versatility wasn't lost on *The Autocar* magazine, when its writers got to grips with B40MD for an early report on the MkII Countryman in 1951, hailing the newcomer as "one of the most distinctive special coachwork designs appearing at Earl's Court this year". The same article went on to »



> “The car’s career took a bizarre turn in 1954 when it was entered into that year’s Monte Carlo Rally”

describe why the latest Countryman was so innovative: “On a Bentley MkVI chassis, the car is of composite construction in steel and aluminium, and hinged flaps at the rear give access to extra-large luggage space achieved by automatically folding rear seats. All the expected Bentley comfort is there, such as occasional tables for the rear passengers and a sunshine roof, and the front windows are electrically operated. Should the early morning shoot follow the all-night party, there is even an optional electric razor!”

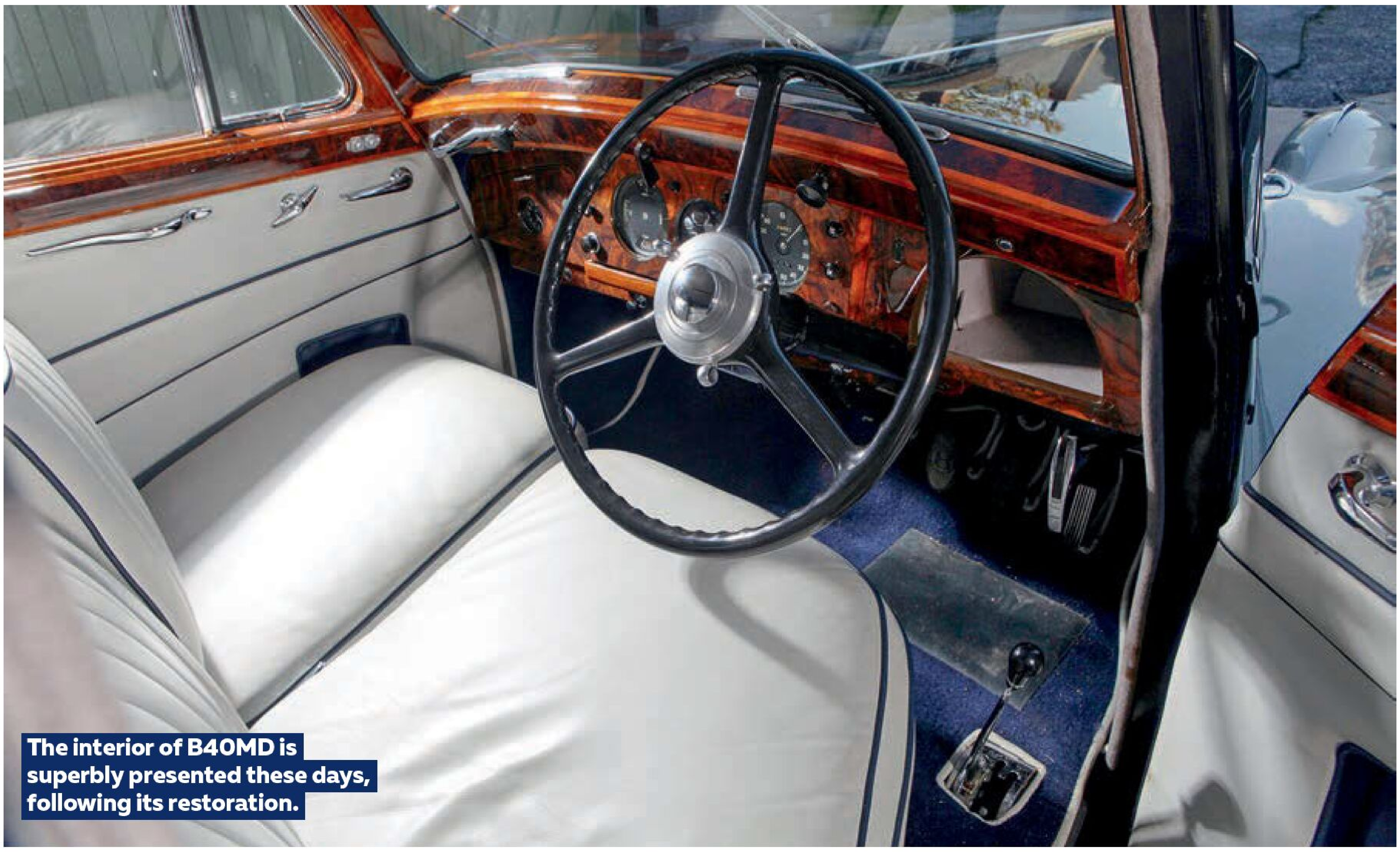
The Countryman was an expensive proposition back in 1951, of course, with *The Autocar* quoting a UK list price of £4245 – plus almost £2360 in Purchase Tax. It was, however, an ingeniously-designed offering, as the magazine readily acknowledged: “A luxurious exterior impression gives little clue to the considerable luggage carrying potentialities of the Countryman, as apart from the unobtrusive upper flap at the rear, the car appears as a normal saloon”.

VARIED CAREER

As the first of the MkII Countryman models, B40MD inevitably became something of a publicity machine for Harold Radford, appearing at two consecutive Earl’s Court Motor Shows (in 1951 and ’52) and featuring in various magazine and press reports of the time. In 1954, however, the car’s career took a rather bizarre turn when it was entered into that year’s Monte Carlo Rally, piloted by Brian McCartney-Filgate (a

Generous rear-seat accommodation offers plenty of comfort – and conveniences.

Folding occasional tables are a useful addition for rear seat passengers.

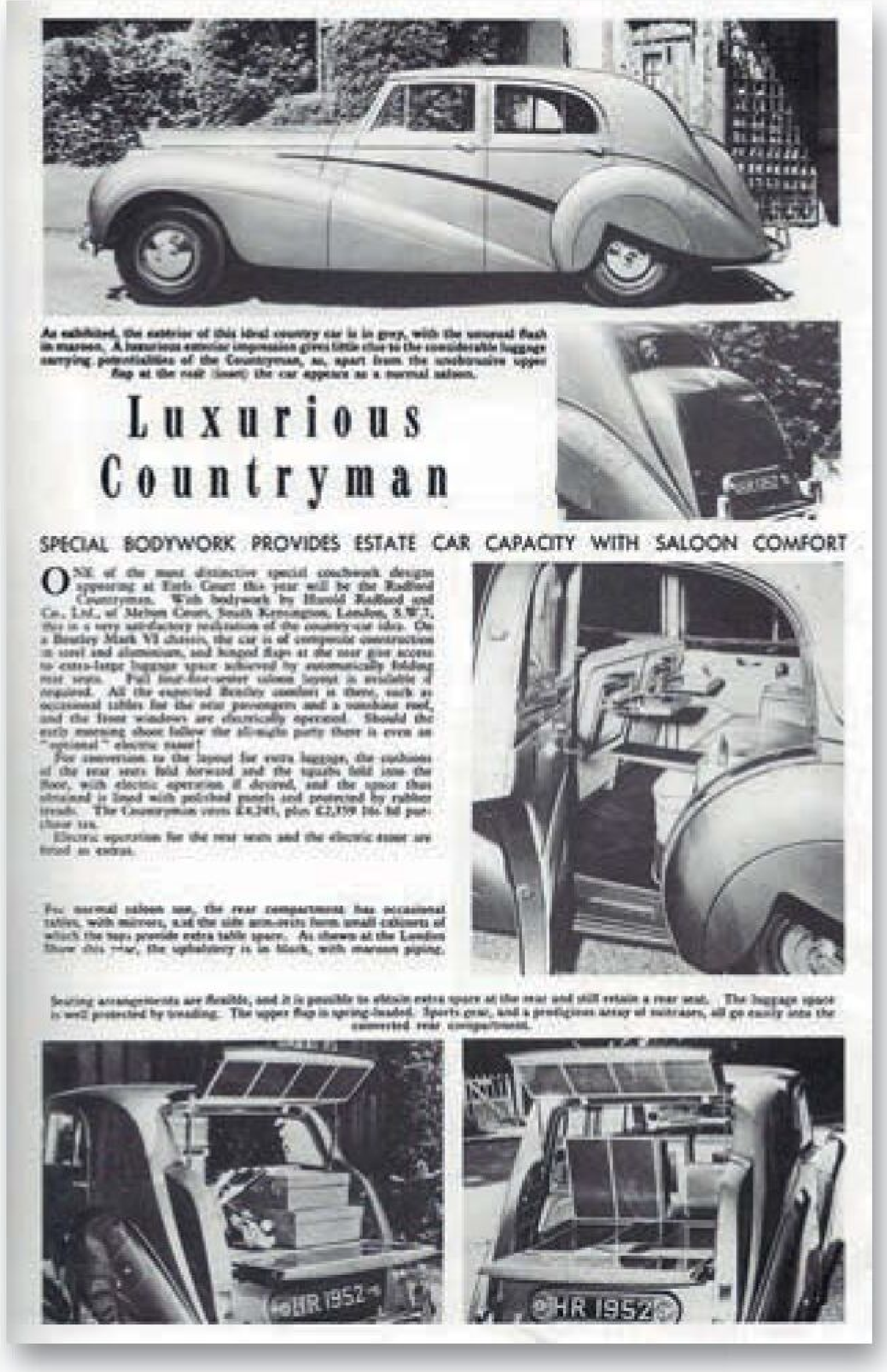


The interior of B40MD is superbly presented these days, following its restoration.

Lagonda dealer at that time) and Major R.W. Holmes, joining such accomplished fellow competitors as Stirling Moss, Mike Couper and Greta Molander. It still carried the HAR 1 registration number famously used by Harold Radford, making it even more recognisable to rally followers of the time.

A coachbuilt MkVI with minor modifications might seem like an odd choice for an international rally, but it says a lot about the inherent durability of the Bentley that it managed to complete the event, achieving a final placement of 108th out of 383 starters – and winning a well-deserved Elegance Award in the process. Adding extra interest to B40MD's already fascinating history is the fact that monochrome photographs of the car competing at Monte Carlo have survived, showing this most unlikely rally star in action.

A less arduous existence then awaited the Countryman, which from late 1954 through to 1967 was owned by John Cleland of Stormont Engineering, whose firm sold Fordson tractors, specialising in converting them for use in the hop fields and orchards of Kent. By 1968, the car was in the hands of »



As exhibited, the exterior of this ideal country car is in grey, with the unusual flash in maroon. A luxurious exterior impression gives little clue to the considerable luggage carrying potentialities of the Countryman, as, apart from the unobtrusive upper flap at the rear (inset) the car appears as a normal saloon.

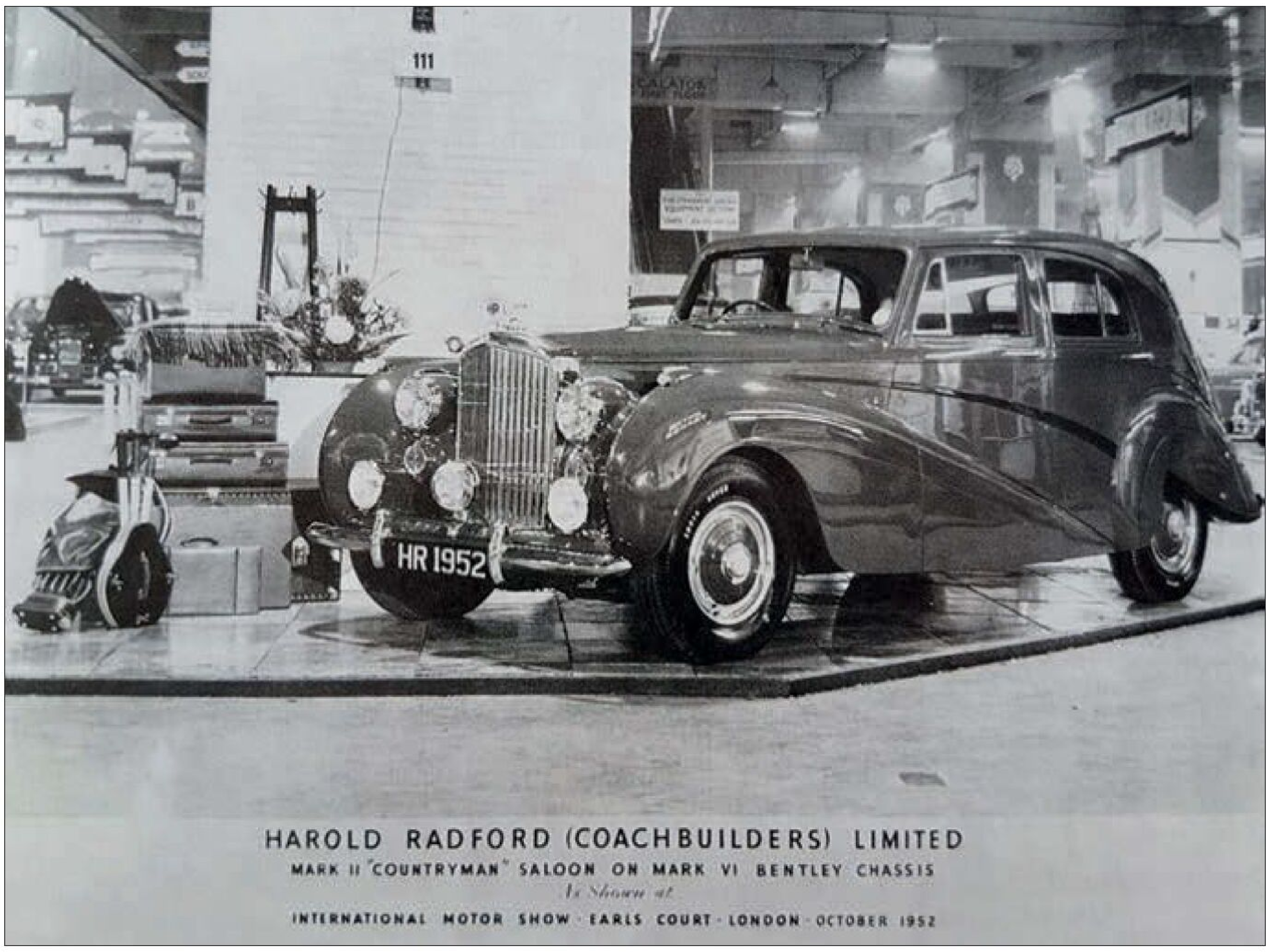
Luxurious Countryman

SPECIAL BODYWORK PROVIDES ESTATE CAR CAPACITY WITH SALOON COMFORT

For normal saloon use, the rear compartment has occasional tables, with mirrors, and the side arm-rests form small cabinets of which the tops provide extra table space. As shown at the London Show this year, the upholstery is in black, with maroon piping.

Seating arrangements are flexible, and it is possible to obtain extra space at the rear and still retain a rear seat. The luggage space is well protected by treading. The upper flap is spring-loaded. Sports gear, and a prodigious array of suitcases, all go easily into the converted rear compartment.

B40MD was the actual Countryman tested by *The Autocar* magazine in 1951.


111
HR 1952
HAROLD RADFORD (COACHBUILDERS) LIMITED
MARK II "COUNTRYMAN" SALOON ON MARK VI BENTLEY CHASSIS
As Shown at
INTERNATIONAL MOTOR SHOW · EARLS COURT · LONDON · OCTOBER 1952

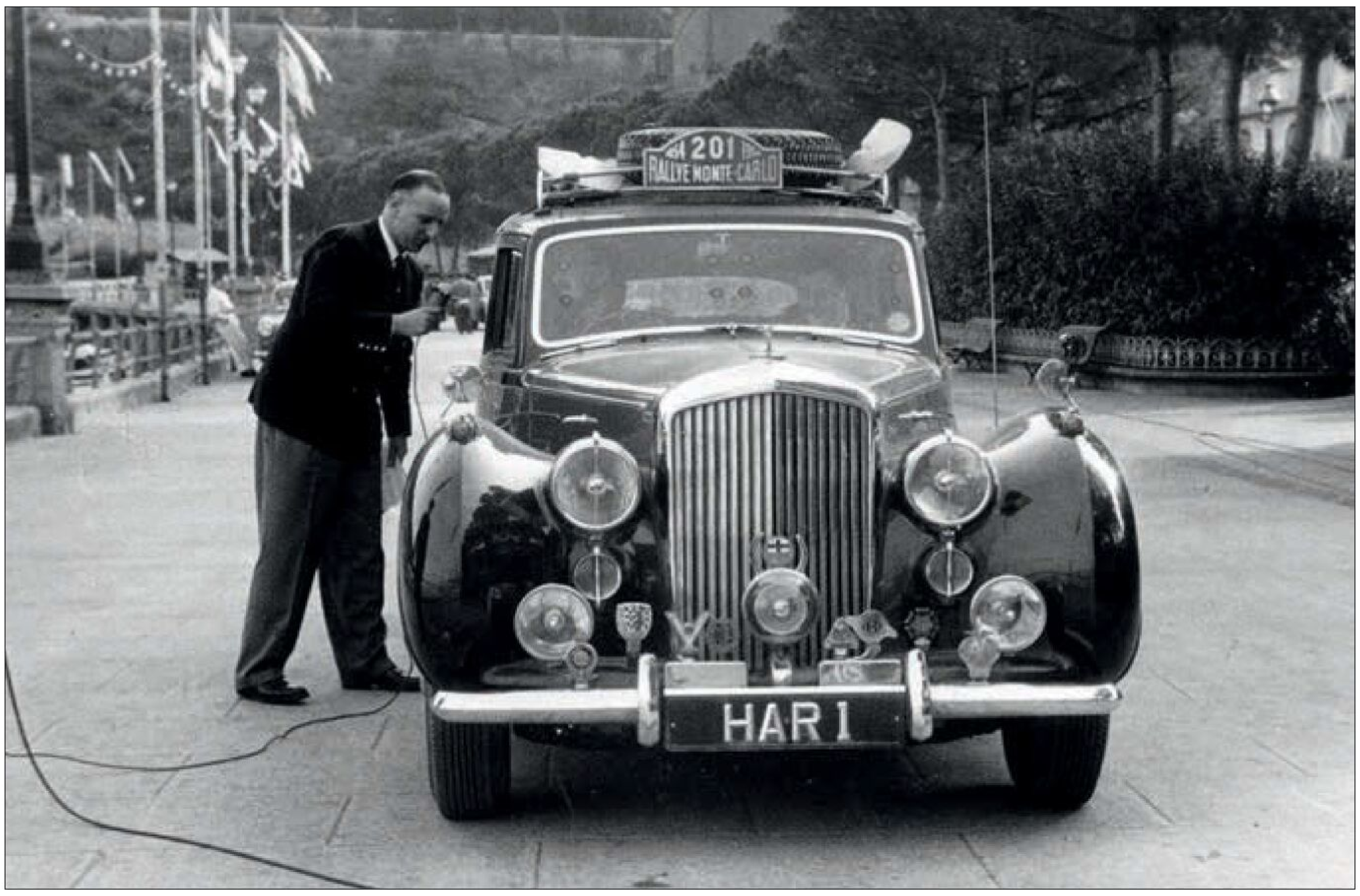
The car was displayed at the Earl's Court Motor Show in both 1951 and '52.

one Hylma Payn of Burningfold Manor, Dunsfold, and three years later it was passed on to her son, Richard Peel. He kept the Bentley until 1988, when it was acquired by Major H.H. Sykes of Craigdarroch House, Monaive.

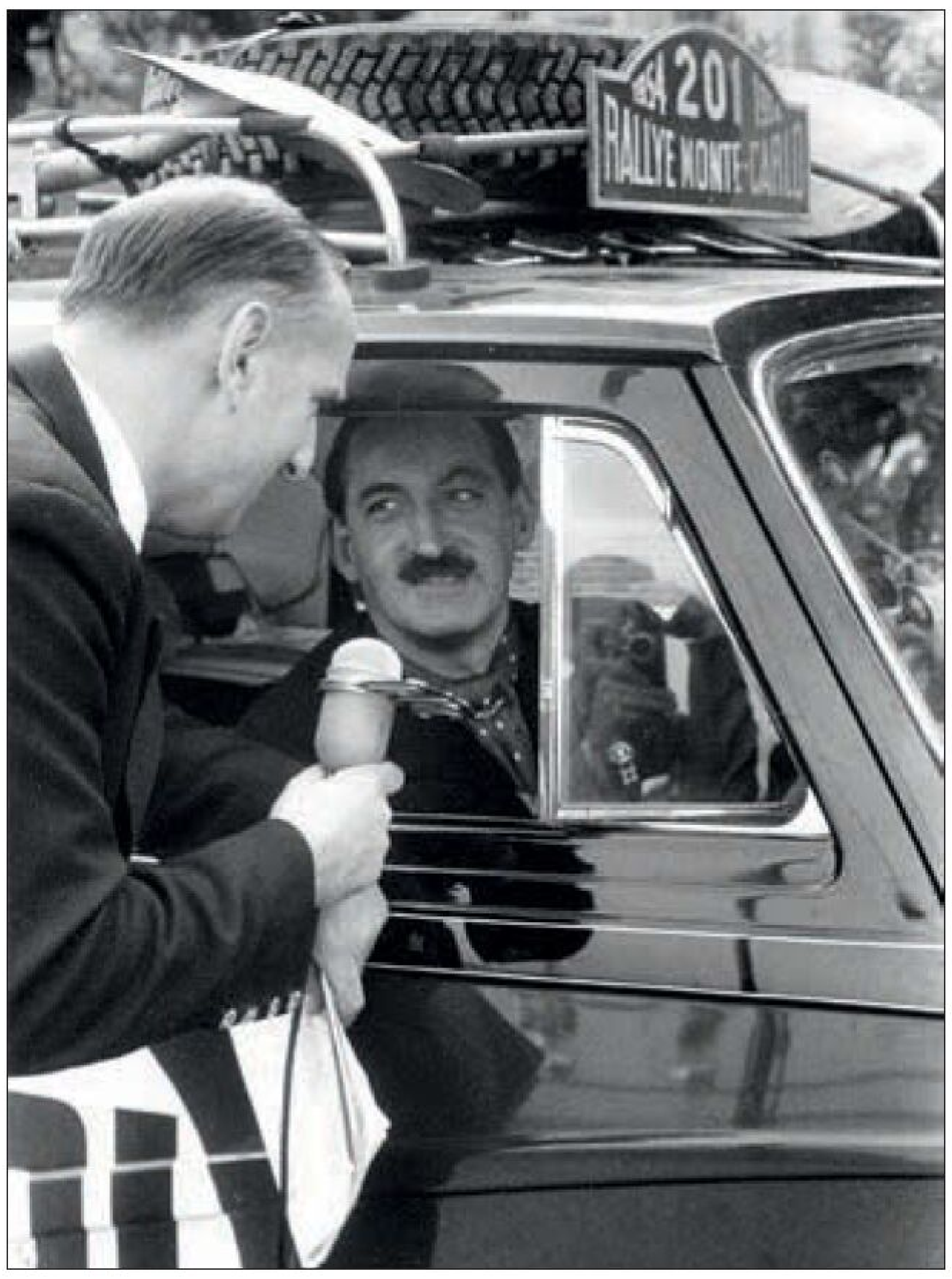
In more recent times, B40MD has been treated to some very high quality restoration work, and the end result is a car that looks stunning from any angle, yet without the over-fresh appearance that can afflict many a newly completed renovation. From the beautifully refurbished wood veneer to the smartly retrimmed, cream-coloured hide upholstery, B40MD's interior is a joy to experience, particularly the superbly detailed hidden compartments that still function and are presented exactly as they would have been when new. The bodywork is also impeccable, finished to a high standard and problem-free throughout.

Needless to say, the car's engine, transmission and running gear are also well detailed and in perfect working order, with the 4½-litre 'big bore' engine starting on the button and instantly settling down to a smooth and even tickover. It provides this handsome machine with pleasing performance, with acceleration through the user-friendly four-speed manual gearbox being effortless, matched by precise (albeit heavy at parking speeds) steering, usefully responsive brakes, and the kind of bump-soaking smooth ride that wealthy buyers of the early 1950s would have expected.

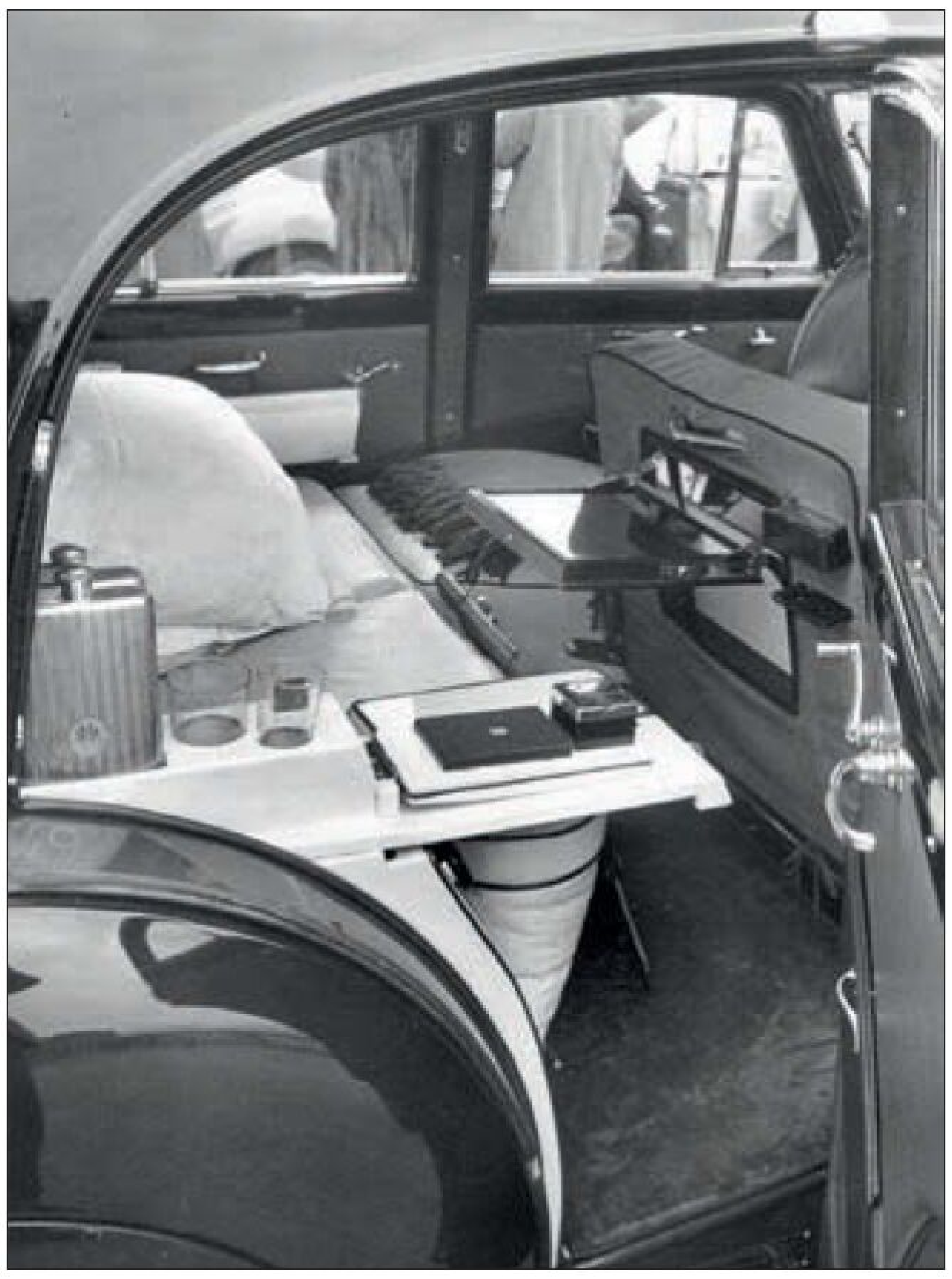
Being able to witness this Radford MkII Countryman for ourselves before its impending trip to the USA was a delight, giving us a chance to experience a Bentley that's fascinatingly different from the norm – and a Harold Radford design that almost oozes ingenuity. ■



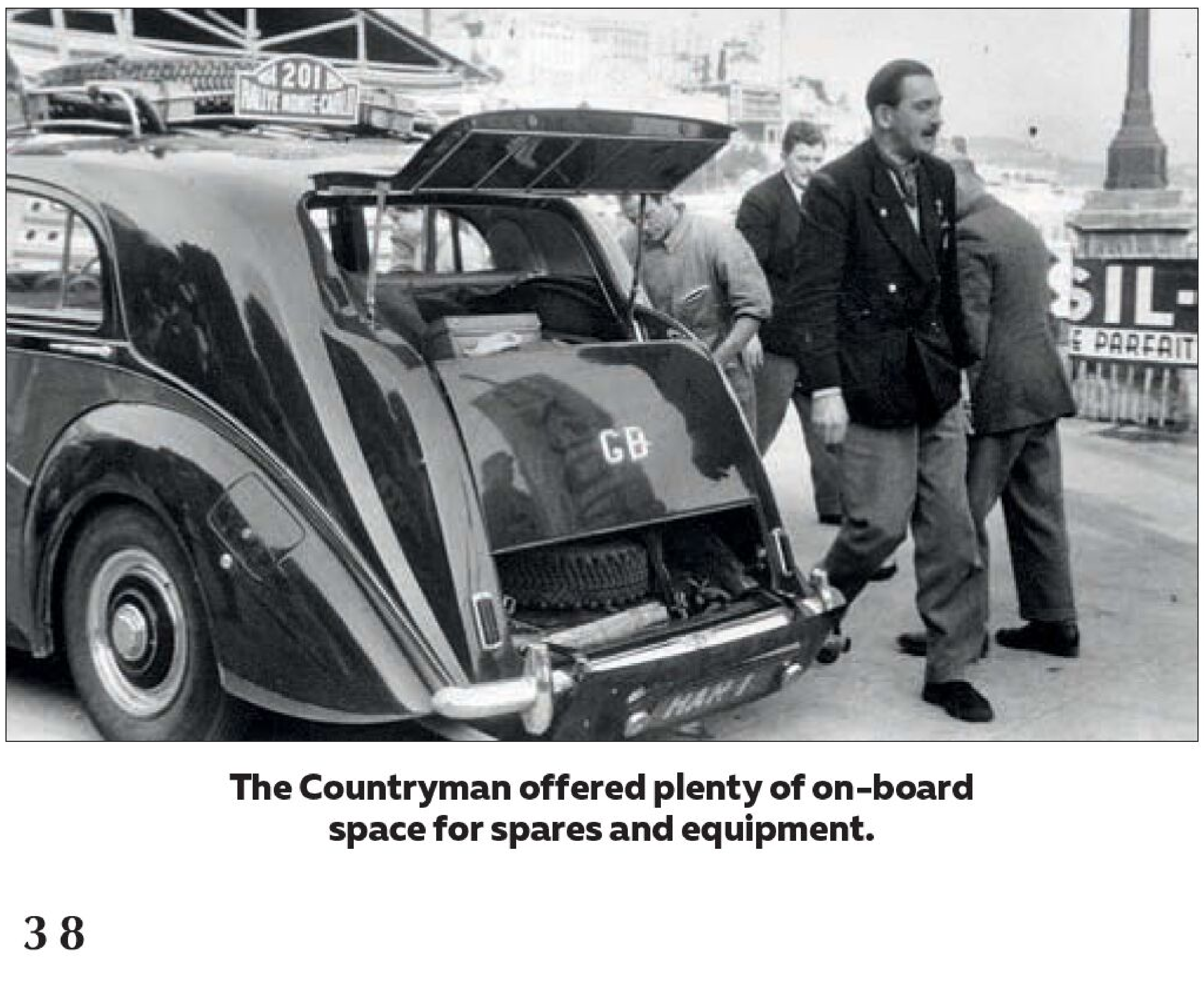
In 1954, B40MD became an unlikely entrant in the challenging Monte Carlo Rally.



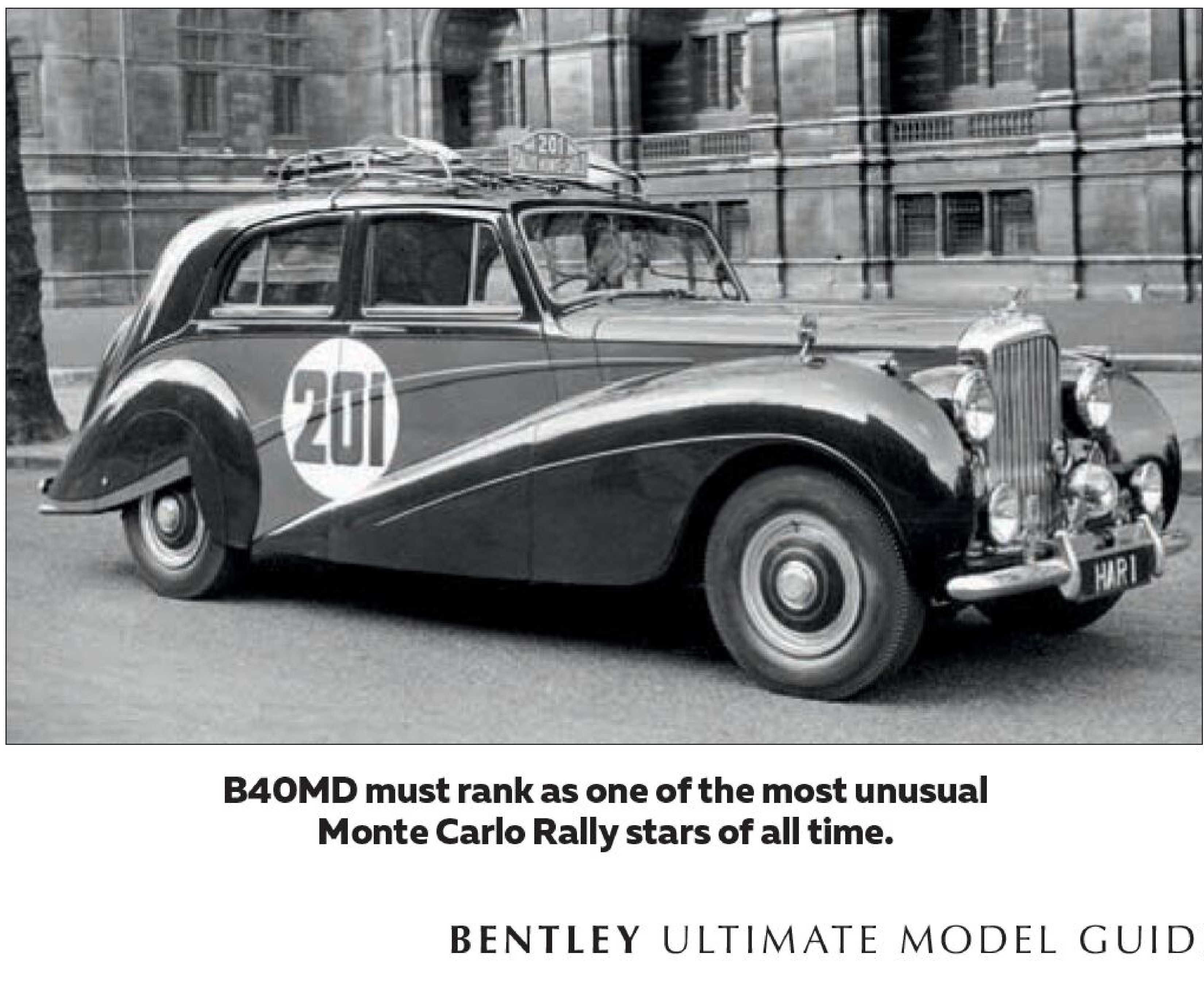
Brian McCartney-Filgate being interviewed at the start of the Monte Carlo Rally.



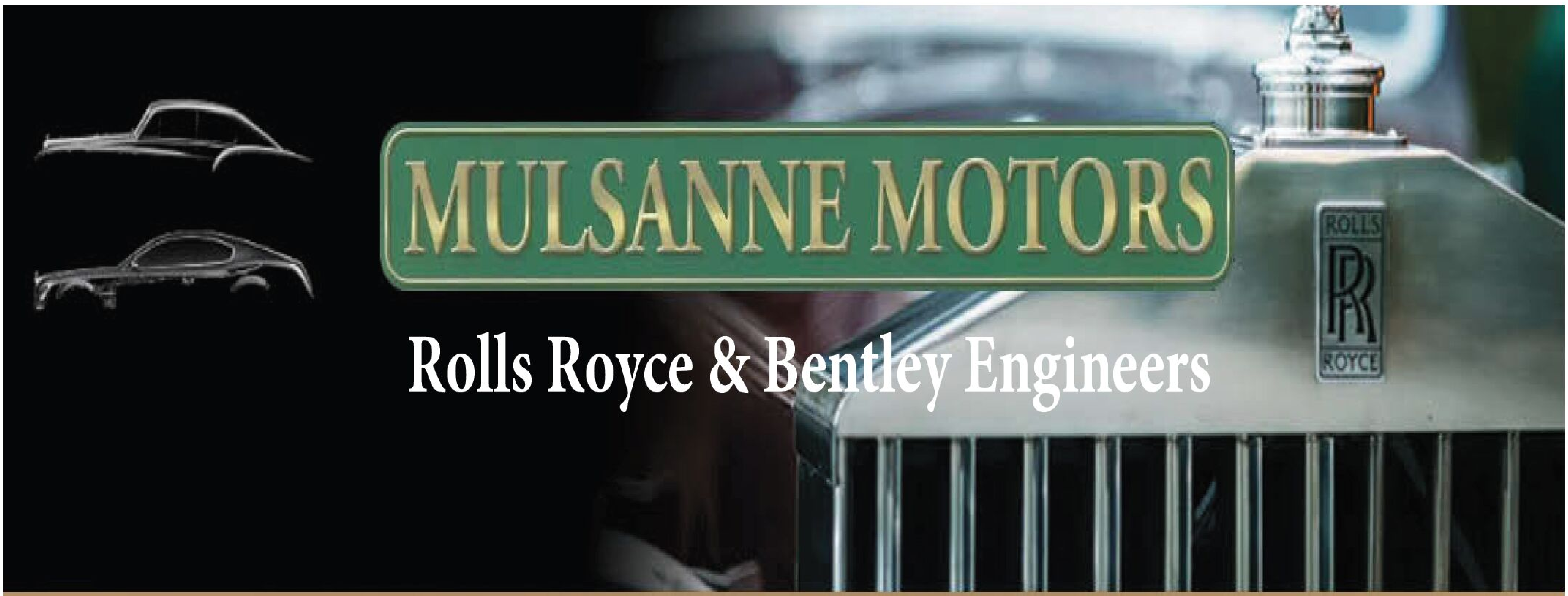
Was this the most luxuriously-equipped rally contender of 1954? Quite possibly...



The Countryman offered plenty of on-board space for spares and equipment.



B40MD must rank as one of the most unusual Monte Carlo Rally stars of all time.



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MODERN APPROACH

The next 25 years in Bentley's history brought engineering innovation, followed by a dramatic fall in demand as Rolls-Royce became the more dominant of the two storied marques

Although the early post-war range started out as a Bentley (MkVI) and subsequently evolved into a Rolls-Royce (Silver Dawn), the next generation was designed and developed in unison. The S-series and Silver Cloud began their careers in 1955, very much still in the mould of what had gone before, with traditional-looking curvaceous bodies mounted on a separate chassis. As the years passed, however, they received changes and modifications that pointed the way towards the direction that Rolls-Royce would take in the 1960s... and way beyond.

At the launch of the newcomers in the mid-1950s, Bentley was the more popular of the two brands, despite Rolls-Royce being better-known in the USA than its sibling marque. During the era of the S-series and Silver Cloud, however, Rolls-Royce would gain dominance over the brand it had acquired in 1931, becoming so successful that Bentley was in danger of being discontinued altogether by the end of the 1970s.

It was John Blatchley who was responsible for the look of the S-series and Silver Cloud, with each car seemingly close to identical aside from its badging and radiator grille. In reality, though, the Bentley also had a slightly lower bonnet line because of its grille's reduced profile, together with a slightly different bonnet pressing, which meant that there was no interchangeability between the two panels.

Blatchley had become chief styling engineer for Rolls-Royce and Bentley

in 1951, when the company formally established its Styling Office as a separate entity to the Experimental Department and the previous design head, Ivan Evernden, moved on. Blatchley headed up a team of three and was more progressive than his predecessor. Interestingly, he was quite taken by American cars, citing himself "particularly amazed by the Cadillacs" when interviewed many years after his retirement.

Early designs for what was initially known as the MkVIII project were quite innovative compared with its predecessors. An early engineering prototype was a long-bonneted R-Type with the engine, radiator and cabin set well back, but this was deemed inappropriate by the upper echelons of Rolls-Royce management. Blatchley's efforts eventually evolved into something that had quite a few elements of the later Silver Shadow, with his Siam concept being quite slab-sided and without the falling swathe line extending back from the front wings. The headlamps were more integral to the wings and set higher up. But it all came to nothing when presented to the powers-that-be in 1951: "I spent years working on one full-size mock-up of the new car, only to be told when it was finished to put it on the bonfire," recalled Blatchley. "It was too modern. So I was asked to do a quick sketch of something more traditional, more in keeping with the Rolls-Royce image, which I did in about ten minutes. It was taken into a board meeting and they decided to make it there and then."

Granted, there were a lot of elements of the previous Siam concept in the "quick sketch", not least the window arrangement and roofline. But a lot of what was below that was reworked, with more rounded lines and an undulating waistline. As hurried as it was, the future S-series' shape was aristocratically beautiful and a significant step up from the Silver Dawn, emerging into the more affluent and optimistic world of the mid-1950s.

The more curvaceous Bentley radiator grille suited the elegant Blatchley-penned styling particularly well.

Stylist John Blatchley (centre) was part of a small but talented team that included Cecily Jenner and Bill Allen.

SEPARATE CHASSIS

The Bentley S-series and Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud, announced in April 1955, featured traditional body-on-frame manufacture that enabled coachbuilt variants to still be built, although most cars would have 'Standard Steel' bodywork produced by the Pressed Steel Company. Despite their 'Standard Steel' designation, however, the newcomers' doors, bonnet and bootlid were all crafted from a lightweight alloy. Power came from the familiar 4887cc six-cylinder inlet-over-exhaust engine, as used in the Bentley R-Type Continental, which was an enlargement of the unit used in the previous models but with a six-port head. While power wasn't revealed at the time, what it regarded as 'adequate' was between 155bhp and 165bhp, with no difference in tuning between the Bentley and Rolls-Royce. Mated to the engine was a four-speed General Motors HydraMatic automatic transmission, which Rolls-Royce had acquired a licence to build itself during 1952.

Other advancements were »

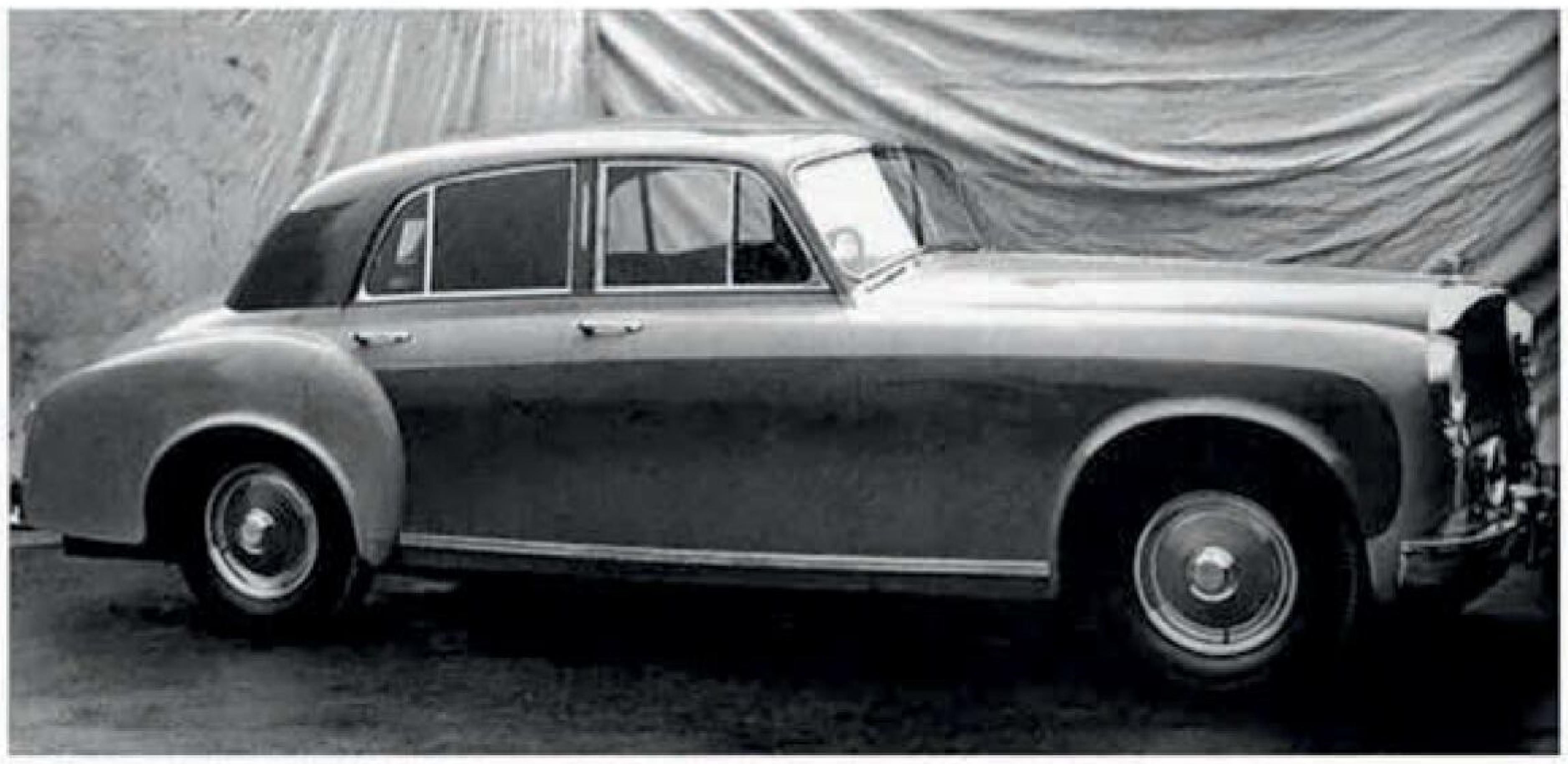
electrically-operated rear dampers and enhanced braking and steering, although notable by their absence were power steering and air conditioning. This didn't sit well with American buyers, most of whom considered both features essential, and so Rolls-Royce soon relented and introduced them to the mix.

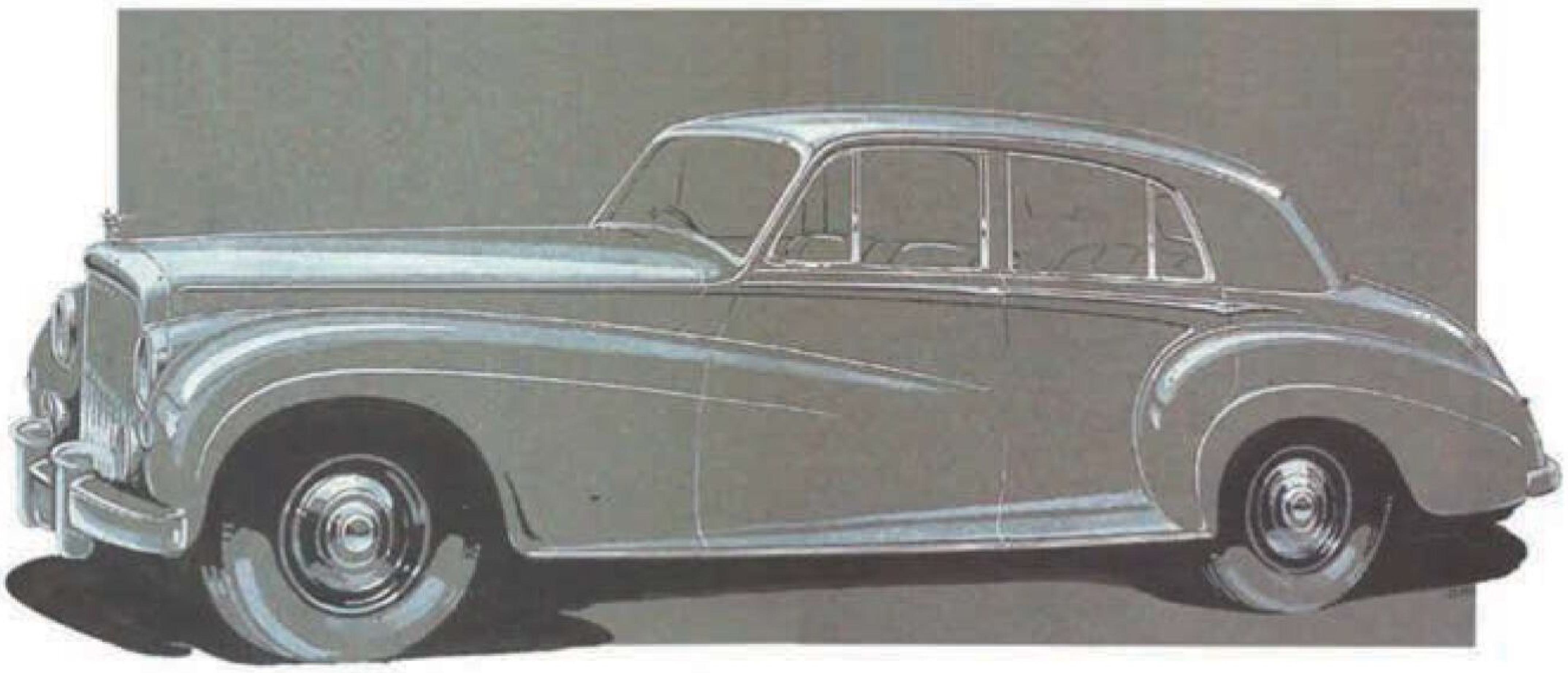
Another upgrade came in 1957, with twin SU carburettors fitted for more power. But it was only with the Bentley S2 and Silver Cloud II that the models finally got the power that American buyers craved via the introduction of Rolls-Royce's L-series V8, which had been in development since 1952 and finally made its debut in '59. Capacity was 6230cc, which greatly improved performance thanks to an estimated 200bhp on tap, with top speed rising from around 103mph to 114mph. Aided by extra torque and acceleration, the Crewe-built saloons were far more in tune with US tastes, as was the fitment of power steering as standard, plus the new option of electric windows.

Aside from fitment of the V8, changes to the second-series cars were fairly minimal. The ventilation system was improved, while blue instrument lighting was adopted inside during 1961, along with a combined indicator/headlamp flasher switch and a handbrake warning light. There were slight tweaks to the exterior lights during the summer of 1962, with sealed beam headlamps and a new rear cluster. However, a much more noticeable and contentious change to the lighting was just around the corner.

October 1962 saw the launch of the Bentley S3 and Silver Cloud III at the Paris Salon. Modifications for the newly updated range included a revamped interior, featuring a padded dashboard and other upgrades as well as more legroom for rear-seat passengers. The engine sprouted larger SU carburettors (two-inch rather than 1¾-inch), and there was also a higher compression ratio, adding what Rolls-Royce claimed to be seven per cent more power. What really grabbed the headlines, however, were the third-generation models' headlamps.

Foreshadowing the look of the Silver Shadow, which was then being developed by John Blatchley, the S3 and Silver Cloud III came with quad lamps, mirroring a growing trend on British cars and influenced by US design. The new nose, coupled with a lowered radiator grille height and bonnet line, not only made the duo look fresher and more up-to-date, but also





The original design (top) and Blatchley's ten-minute re-sketch, the latter given the go-ahead by Rolls-Royce management.

BENTLEY EXCLUSIVITY

Until the arrival of the Silver Shadow, Bentley tended to outperform Rolls-Royce when it came to sales. Early examples of the Silver Cloud, for example, were significantly outsold by the S-series, while the generation before had also seen Bentley enjoying considerable success. The 1946-52 MkVI sold over 5200 units in total, with its R-Type successor of 1952-55 (derived from the MkVI) attracting 2323 buyers. By comparison, the Rolls-Royce Silver Dawn (another MkVI derivative of 1949-55) achieved a mere 760 sales.

The arrival of the Silver Shadow in 1965, however, marked a remarkable fall from grace for the Bentley marque. Rolls-Royce's first monocoque-bodied model went on to be a major success, with 19,497 of the original four-door saloon (prior to the Silver Shadow II of 1977) being sold over 12 years. By comparison, just 1712 of the Bentley T-series (before the T2 of '77) attracted buyers, leading Rolls-Royce to contemplate dropping the Bentley marque altogether when work began on a Silver Shadow successor in the 1970s.

Fortunately, however, that never happened, and Bentley went on to enjoy renewed appeal – and booming sales – throughout the '80s and beyond.

paved the way for the next generation of models – a range that would bring even more modernity and controversy.

With the debut of the Silver Shadow getting ever closer, changes to the S3 and Silver Cloud III were relatively few and far between. Stainless steel wheel trims replaced the chrome items in April 1963, and wider front seats came in during 1964. The headlamp surrounds also received a small Rolls-Royce logo in June '64, with a corresponding Bentley monogram on the S3. By then, however, the era of the separate-chassis Bentley was drawing to a close.

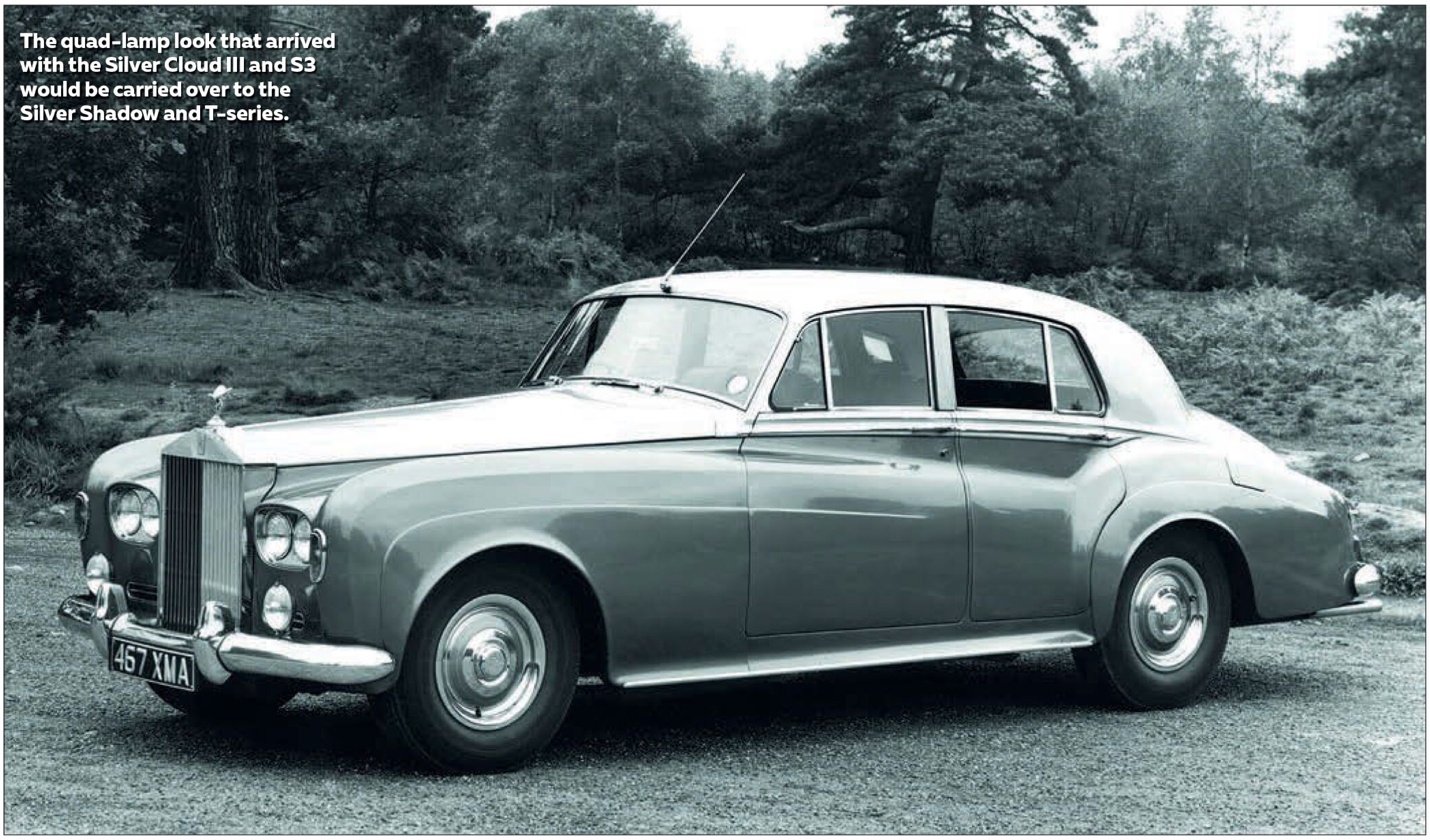
THE NEW WORLD

True revolution for Bentley and Rolls-Royce arrived in 1965 with the debut of the new T-series and Silver Shadow respectively, each bringing a drastic change of style compared with their predecessors as well as new levels of hi-tech modernity. Moving technology forward in such a profound way enabled the T-series and Silver Shadow to enjoy an extended career, with the four-door saloons remaining in production for an impressive 15 years.

Car design and customer requirements had evolved rapidly at »

> "The S-series featured traditional body-on-frame manufacture that enabled coachbuilt variants to still be built"

Standard Steel bodyshells were built by Pressed Steel, though Crewe craftsmen were responsible for the final finish.



The quad-lamp look that arrived with the Silver Cloud III and S3 would be carried over to the Silver Shadow and T-series.

the start of the '60s, which meant that John Blatchley faced a dilemma when it came to creating a Silver Cloud successor. There would always be wealthy buyers who wanted the ultimate in chauffeur-driven prestige; but as the new decade dawned, Blatchley knew that his next-generation models needed to cater for a fresh breed of owner-driver client, which meant offering the kind of luxury that a Bentley and Rolls-Royce should but in a more compact, more manoeuvrable package.

Blatchley also knew that the way the car was built needed to change, as the world was moving away from the separate-chassis layouts of old. The use of monocoque construction might have caused consternation among Britain's traditional coachbuilders, but it was a must for any new Bentley or Rolls-Royce that needed to bring extra sales and increased profits. Adopting a modern monocoque layout would enable the newcomer to be both lighter and smaller than the S-series and Silver Cloud, which in turn would have an effect on both

> "The S3 came with quad lamps, mirroring a growing trend on British cars and influenced by US design"

CREATING THE CORNICHE

Although there was little to differentiate the new-for-1971 Bentley Corniche (and its Rolls-Royce sibling) from the T-series Mulliner Park Ward two-door saloon and drophead that had gone before, the change of name and associated updates were important, coming at a time when Rolls-Royce faced well-publicised financial difficulties.

Exterior differences between the Corniche and its forebear included a mildly redesigned radiator grille, rectangular reversing lamps, fog lamps, special wheel trims and a different dashboard, while the engine was subtly reworked to produce "adequate plus 10 per cent" power. There was no need for major change thanks to the already handsome looks of the MPW cars, styled by John Blatchley.

Running gear was also carried across from the standard saloon, which meant the 6.75-litre L-series V8, SU-fed and driving a GM400 three-speed automatic gearbox at launch. As the standard T-series of the era was upgraded, so too was the Corniche, which gained improvements like fuel injection and an extra gear during its extensive career. And, of course, the Corniche also shared the suspension of the equivalent-era saloon (self-levelling at the back), powered hydraulic brakes and power assisted steering.

The first change to the Corniche was made in 1973, when an extra quarter of an inch was added to the wheelbase. In 1977, however, came a more thorough revision in line with the UK-spec T2 and Silver Shadow II, with the Corniche gaining rubber bumpers, a new lower spoiler, new dashboard, rack and pinion steering and split-level air conditioning. The wheelbase was lengthened again in 1979 (by an extra half inch), and the rear suspension was revised. The hardtop Corniche was phased out in March 1981, but the convertible continued.

July 1984 saw the Bentley Corniche being rebadged as the Continental, whilst also gaining colour-coded bumpers and grille vanes, new rear view mirrors and redesigned seats. Bosch K-Jetronic injection replaced the Solex 4A1 in 1987, while the following year brought a revised dashboard and seats, ABS and other detail changes. The Bentley Continental abandoned steel wheels in favour of alloys in 1989, whilst also gaining colour coded bumpers and airbags. The final facelift occurred in 1992 with the adoption of Active Ride Technology, while the hood was modified again to incorporate a glass rear window.

Although a total of 6277 Rolls-Royce Corniches were built, of which just 1108 were saloons, Bentley derivatives were much less numerous. A mere 581 were made with Bentley badging, comprising 63 Corniche saloons, 77 convertibles and 441 Continentals.

performance and fuel economy, as well as enabling the company to build in larger numbers than before.

What would become the new T-series and Silver Shadow had to be modern in terms of construction, as well as offering a smoother ride, much-improved handling and more stability at high speed than the S-series and Silver Cloud, hence the adoption of fully independent suspension. And with Citroën being world leaders in terms of suspension technology, Rolls-Royce wisely chose to licence the French firm's hydropneumatic system, albeit redesigned at Crewe to incorporate conventional coil springs. The hydraulics provided self-levelling to maintain the car's ride quality irrespective of load, as well as powering its four-wheel disc brakes to ensure reassuringly strong stopping power.

One of the few elements of the T-series that was carried over from the S-series was its 6230cc V8, a unit capable of endowing the smaller, lighter newcomer with superior performance compared with its predecessor.

QUESTION OF STYLE

Work on a successor to the S-series and Silver Cloud began while those cars were still in their prime, with John Blatchley focused on the need for modernity: "Styling this car was very much an architectural exercise… the specification demanded it be lower, narrower and shorter with more luggage space and a bigger petrol tank. My biggest challenge was getting all this paraphernalia, plus passengers, into a car that still looked right."

Prototypes began to appear in the late 1950s and early '60s, codenamed Burma (for the Bentley) and Tibet (for the Rolls-Royce), the original plan being to make the Bentley the smaller of the two. Even at that early stage, the final shape of the Silver Shadow was beginning to emerge, although the wraparound screens and reverse-angle rear door windows made those initial cars look dated compared with the eventual production model.

The grille treatment of the early prototypes was also controversial, as Blatchley experimented with numerous options (including a full-width grille design incorporating quad headlamps) before deciding on the final version. Martin Bourne, another member of »

The S-series' separate chassis remained a popular choice among coachbuilders, hence variations like this stunning drophead coupe by HJ Mulliner.

Inside the S-series and Silver Cloud, John Blatchley and his team combined Rolls-Royce traditionalism with a fresh look.

“Prototypes began to appear in the late 1950s and early ’60s, codenamed Burma (for the Bentley)”

the Rolls-Royce design team from 1959, recalled the many changes made during the new SY generation’s early development: “Hardly a day went by when some small detail of its appearance wasn’t being considered”.

Rolls-Royce was also working with the British Motor Corporation (BMC) at this time, the idea being to adapt one or two of the bigger company’s models into a higher-volume Bentley employing Crewe’s 4.0-litre, six-cylinder F60 engine. And so while Blatchley and his team worked on development of the Silver Shadow, he also created a front and rear restyle of the Vanden Plas Princess 3 Litre (codenamed Java) to accommodate a Bentley grille between stacked quad headlamps. This eventually evolved into Java 3, a concept with definite overtones of the Silver Shadow. In the end, however, the idea of a BMC-based Bentley came to nothing.

The production versions of the new T-series and Silver Shadow made their motor show debuts at Earl’s Court in the autumn of 1965, with *Autocar* magazine hailing them as “the most advanced and intricate car the company have introduced”. Other members of the motoring press were equally impressed, with Basil Cardew of the *Daily Express* describing the newcomers as “smaller, roomier, lighter, swifter” than their predecessors. John Blatchley’s brief that the T-series and Silver Shadow should be lower, narrower and shorter than before (the Silver Cloud was three and a half inches wider and seven inches longer), whilst offering more space for people and their luggage, had been well and truly delivered.

How would the Bentley and Rolls-Royce fans of old take to such an advanced design, though? Bentley Drivers Club president, Stanley Sedgwick, borrowed a new T-series in 1966, and was immediately impressed: “I accepted the design of the body for what it was. I liked it and I think the S-Types really did look dated beside the car. The more I saw of the car, the more I considered it better looking than any of its contemporaries.”

STEADY DEVELOPMENT

Subtle but effective upgrades and improvements were introduced to the T-series and Silver Shadow to

The T-series was launched at the same time as the Silver Shadow, but was to prove less of a commercial success.

The Bentley T2 of 1977, shown in this launch-year brochure, brought the same improvements as the Silver Shadow II.

ensure they stayed ahead of the luxury car pack, beginning as early as the end of 1965 with the adoption of a lighter brake pedal movement. October 1967 saw a Saginaw power steering pump replacing the original Hobourn Eaton type, complementing the Saginaw recirculating ball steering system, and at the same time the car's opening front quarter light windows were changed to fixed units.

Both models received a revised handbrake, higher-ratio steering and an uprated front anti-roll bar (as well as a rear anti-roll bar for the first time, although not on US-spec cars) in 1968, along with the latest GM400 automatic transmission from General Motors. The latter was modified, however, as Malcolm Bobbitt explains in *Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow, Bentley T-Series, Camargue & Corniche* (Veloce Publishing): "Although the GM400 gearbox was brought-in direct from America, the electric selector actuation was not part of its specification and this, therefore, was added at Crewe. Rolls-Royce was the only manufacturer to fit electric actuation to this type of gearbox – which allowed the lightest finger-tip control – and whilst such cars as the Cadillac were fitted with the same unit, ratio selection was operated manually."

Other relatively early changes to the T-series and Silver Shadow included the deletion of self-levelling front suspension in 1969, which might have seemed like a retrograde step at the time. In truth, however, the self-levelling front end had relatively little work to do, and its deletion actually managed to improve the car's handling and steering (which some testers had found to be a little vague). The biggest upgrade at the end of '69, however, ready for the 1970 model year, was the introduction of the latest 6750cc version of the L-series V8, created via a redesigned crankshaft, which in turn lengthened the stroke. Although Rolls-Royce refused to disclose » any power or torque figures, it was estimated that the T-series and Silver Shadow now had somewhere in the region of 220bhp at their disposal.

The difference in driving style was immediately noticeable by all those who tested the car, as Malcolm Bobbit explains in his previously mentioned book: "John Bolster, testing the 6.75-litre-engined Silver Shadow for *Autosport* in December 1970, was impressed at how much low-speed torque had been improved. Overall speed had also increased, and he found the car easily achieved 118mph."

> **"The appointed receiver realised the importance of 'business as usual' for the car-making side of the company"**

The process of improving both models continued unabated, although disaster occurred in 1971 with the collapse of Rolls-Royce following difficulties with its aero-engine division. The appointed receiver realised the importance of 'business as usual' for the car-making side of the company, however, and ordered that production of the T-series and Silver Shadow should not be affected. As part of the subsequent restructuring, the car division was sold off in 1973 as Rolls-Royce Motors, which proved something of a double-edged sword: the firm was now free from the risk of being dragged down by the troubles of a parent group, but resources were much more slender. Although ideas for Silver Shadow and T-series replacements had been part of management discussions for some time, the eventual successors weren't to appear until the start of the '80s, which inevitably meant extending the life of the company's core models.

February 1977 therefore saw the official unveiling of the new Bentley T2 and Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow II, with the most obvious visual changes being plastic-faced alloy bumpers with polyurethane side pieces, while below the front bumper were a spoiler (aimed at improving high-speed stability) and a pair of front fog lamps. Inside, the newcomers boasted a redesigned fascia with revised instrumentation, while the air conditioning was upgraded to a split-level system. Most important of all, however, was the adoption of rack and pinion steering and a modified suspension system, ensuring that the T2 and Silver Shadow II offered the kind of sharpened-up handling and more precise steering that luxury car buyers of the late 1970s expected.

Production of both the T2 and Silver Shadow II officially ceased in late 1980 (although some cars weren't despatched from Crewe until early the following year), at a time when Rolls-Royce Motors was preparing itself for the launch of their successors. What had been a hugely successful design was finally being consigned to the history books, having evolved from being cutting-edge models packed with modernity to the highly respected elder statesmen of the luxury saloon world. ■

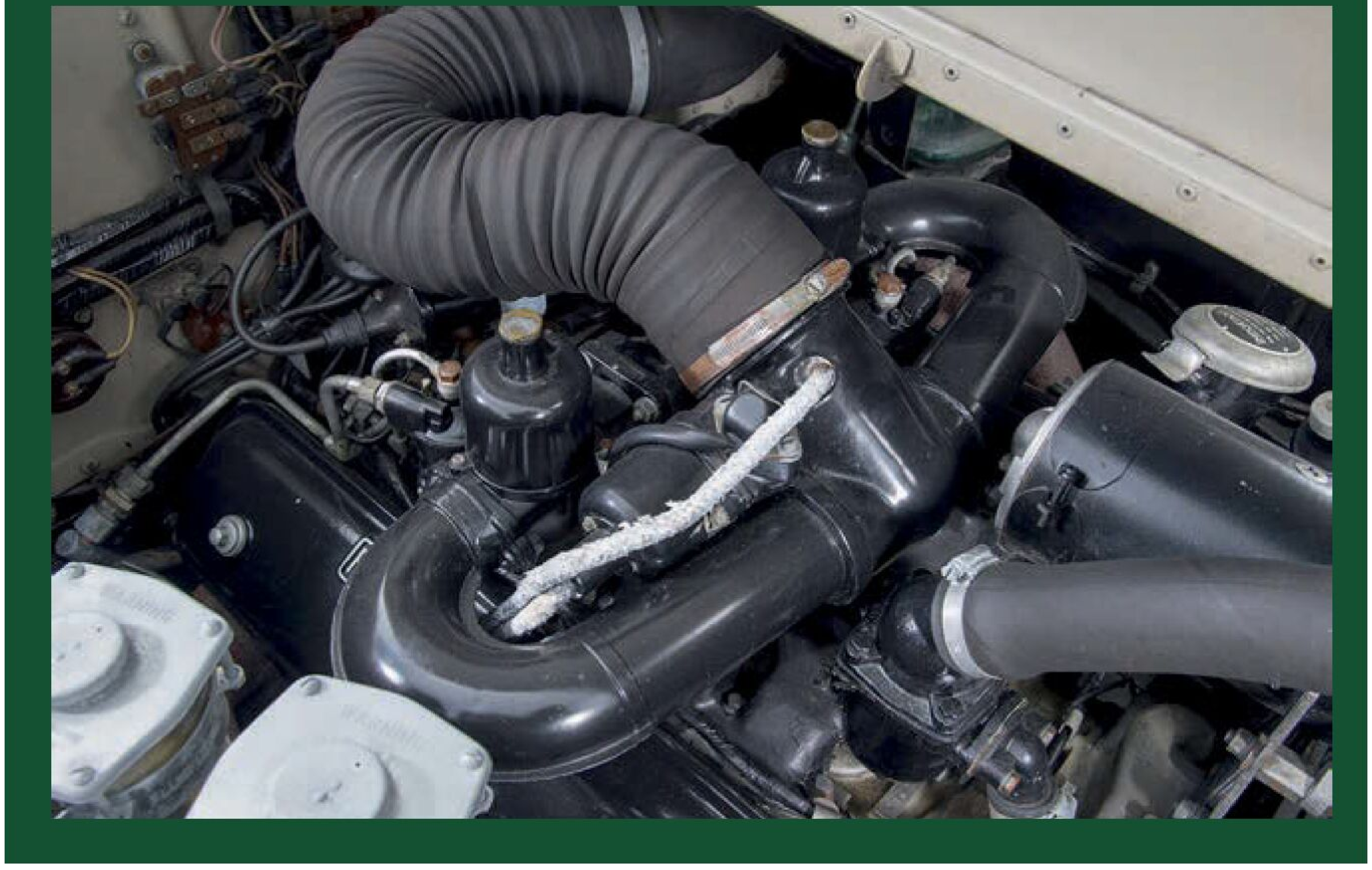
LONG-RUNNING V8

The L-series V8, as introduced in the Bentley S2 and Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud II of 1959, would go on to have an unrivalled 61-year career. It was only in 2020 that the last model to use it, the decade-old Bentley Mulsanne, finally ceased manufacture.

At the end of the 1990s, when BMW and Volkswagen were battling for ownership of Rolls-Royce and Bentley, VW famously reintroduced the old V8 engine to usurp the more modern BMW unit powering the new Bentley Arnage, citing customer demand – although the reality was that VW didn't want to rely on BMW engine supplies at a time when the two marques were at loggerheads.

The L-series was painstakingly developed by Rolls-Royce engineers, with work beginning as early as 1952, as the company felt that stretching its existing six-cylinder motor any further would compromise its refinement. The new powerplant ended up taking some of its layout inspiration from the iconic Rolls-Royce Merlin V12 aircraft engine of the Second World War.

The L-series was an overhead-valve design angled at 90 degrees, with a central camshaft, five-bearing crankshaft and wedge-shaped combustion chambers. Both the block and the head were of aluminium alloy. The original displacement – as in the Bentley S3 and Silver Cloud II – was 6230cc, but the stroke was increased from 3.6ins to 3.9ins for the 1970 model year, to give a 6750cc capacity.



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CONTINENTAL TWIST

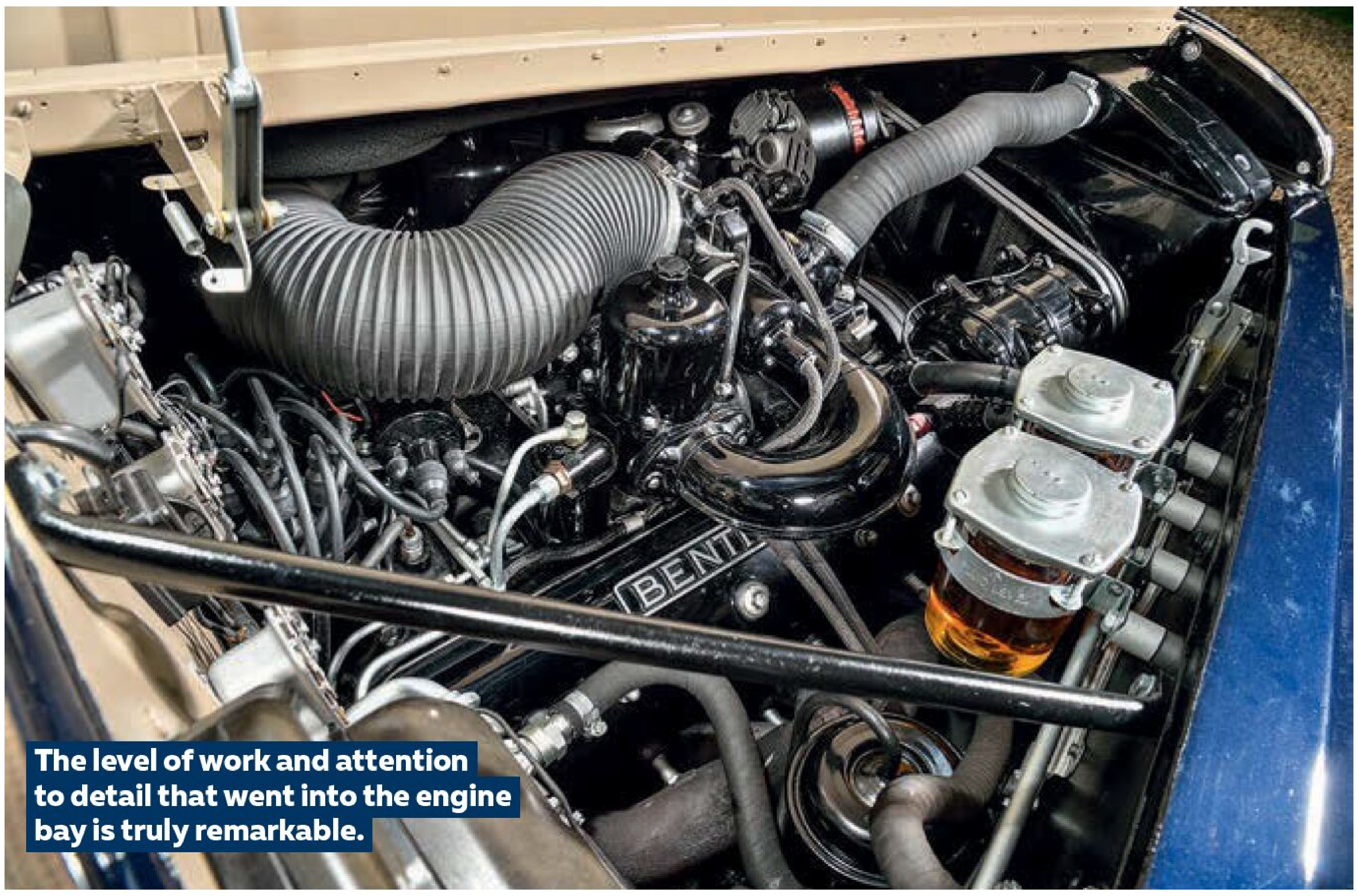
Alan Peck's lifelong ambition to own a fastback Continental took a different direction some years ago, when he instead opted for this two-door 'booted' version of a coachbuilt S2

"Back in the late 1950s, when I was on a management course at Claridge's, I'd often find myself looking through the window of the nearby Jack Barclay showroom, admiring the lines of the Bentley Continental fastback," smiles Alan Peck, a now-retired hotelier and restaurateur who lives in a picturesque village in rural Surrey. As one of the most expensive cars of its time, the H.J. Mulliner-built model was the stuff of dreams for a young man just starting out on his career. But in more recent years, Alan has finally been able to fulfil his Continental ambitions… albeit with a twist.

"When I retired, I decided it was the right time to buy one of these now-classic models," explains Alan. "I drove a number of available examples but was unable to find the right one, with the kind of history file I was looking for." The other issue facing Alan was more of a domestic one: "My wife, Wendy, wasn't a fan of the fastback Continental. She didn't like the design at the back."

Alan then had a phone call from Paul Brightman of what is now Ranmore Service & Engineering (formerly Royce Service & Engineering), who told him about an S2 Continental Mulliner two-door that the company had maintained for a number of years. When its owner (Tony Ryan of Ryanair fame) passed away, the car was acquired by Ranmore, who became its latest custodian until a deal was finally struck with Alan: "I was a little apprehensive until I actually drove the Bentley and could then appreciate its effortless V8 power and its smooth automatic gear changes. This was a car that was capable of speeds well in excess of 100mph when new."

The other reason for opting for this handsome two-door coupé was the positive reaction at home, recalls»



The level of work and attention to detail that went into the engine bay is truly remarkable.

Alan: "As soon as she saw it, Wendy said 'Oh, I like that, it's got a beautiful line to it.' She thought it was far more attractive than the fastback models I was originally looking at." The downside, however, was that the Bentley's aesthetic condition left a lot to be desired, although it was mechanically sound thanks to relatively recent work carried out by the Ranmore team: "The car had been treated to an engine rebuild, a new exhaust system, and a front suspension and brake overhaul, but it needed some bodywork attention. I asked Paul and Patrick [at Ranmore] what it would cost to make the car spotless, and on the strength of that estimate I bought it."

GETTING STARTED

Work began on the Bentley in the spring of 2013, the idea being to strip the bodywork back to bare metal in order to carry out the necessary repairs, as well as fully restoring the car's interior and exterior trim to a high standard. It was decided that all such work could be carried out with the body still in situ, particularly as there was no intention of aiming for a concours-style standard of finish. As is so often the case, however, expectations rose as the project progressed, with Alan becoming

This particular S2-based two-door design by H.J. Mulliner offered useful extra boot space over the fastback Continentals.

increasingly involved in the restoration: "I'm a bit of a perfectionist," he confesses, "and I'd call in on Paul, Patrick and the team every couple of weeks to check on how things were going."

Perhaps inevitably, discussions soon turned to transforming the Bentley into a potential concours d'elegance contender, with Alan being increasingly impressed by the ongoing work each time he visited. The bodywork repairs proved to be a particular challenge, with the sills needing plenty of work. A steel plate runs through the centre, with aluminium bracketry bolted to it; but with the age-old issue of corrosion setting in where steel and aluminium meet, the various pieces were becoming separated. The only solution was to fabricate new steel and alloy sections and begin a gradual build-up of the sills virtually from scratch, with modern-style protection being incorporated throughout to ensure the same problem never recurs.

Such issues weren't just confined to the sills, however, with Ranmore's experts cutting away sections of aluminium from other panels only to discover corrosion issues with the mountings, which then had to be carefully replaced by hand-crafted replicas. The nearside rear wing was also suffering from fairly major corrosion, particularly around the petrol cap door, with previous poor repairs having to be cut out and fresh metal carefully shaped and fitted.

MULLINER RARITY

The fastback design of the H.J. Mulliner-built Continental meant restrictions when it came to luggage space, making it less of the perfect long-distance touring machine than its maker might have hoped. The arrival of the Continental Special at the 1958 Earl's Court Motor Show provided a solution, although customer resistance to its controversial styling details saw the design modified the following year.

This stylistically improved version of the 'booted' two-door saw the design carried forward to the subsequent S2 Continental chassis, at which point it was given design number 7514. In *Coachwork on Rolls-Royce & Bentley 1945-1965*, author James Taylor explains more about this latest offering: "It became the coachbuilder's standard two-door design for the S2 Continental, and was later modified with the four-headlamp front end for the S3 Continental chassis as well, when it became a product of the Mulliner Park Ward edition. No fewer than 74 examples were built, of which 26 were on left-hand drive chassis."

DECISION MAKING

This was, of course, all very time-consuming, as was the process of panel alignment – particularly the doors, which obviously weigh less when fully stripped and therefore proved a challenge when it came to getting the panel gaps and shut lines all perfect. A huge amount of time went into making sure everything was just so, but all the while a question mark hung over how the car should be finished. Or rather, what colour it should be.

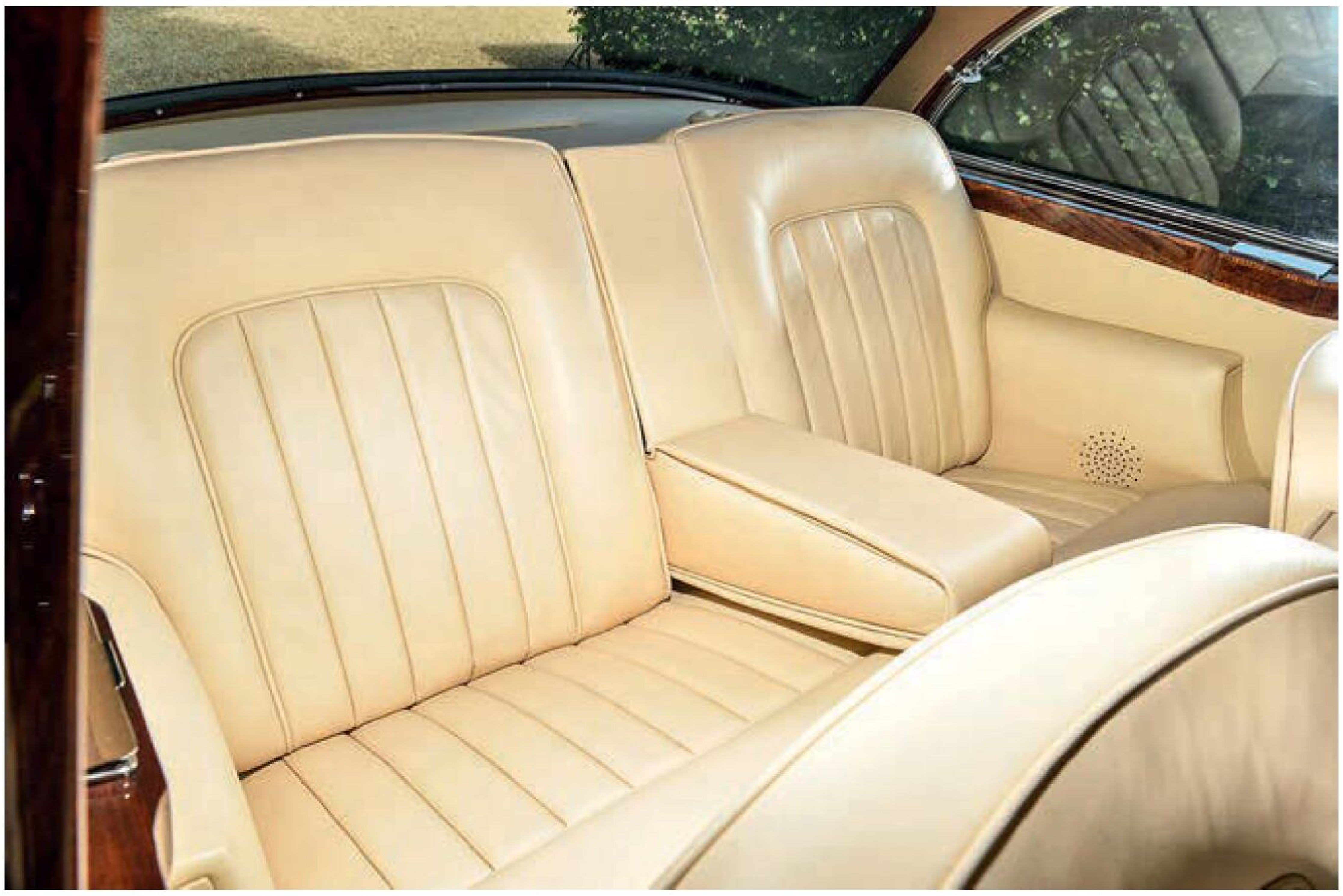
The Bentley had started out as a Tudor Grey example, only to be resprayed in Masons Black in later life. Alan, however, had other ideas: "I wanted a colour that I thought would really suit the lines of the car, one that would make it stand out." Various tests were carried out on a Silver Shadow bonnet, with numerous different shades »

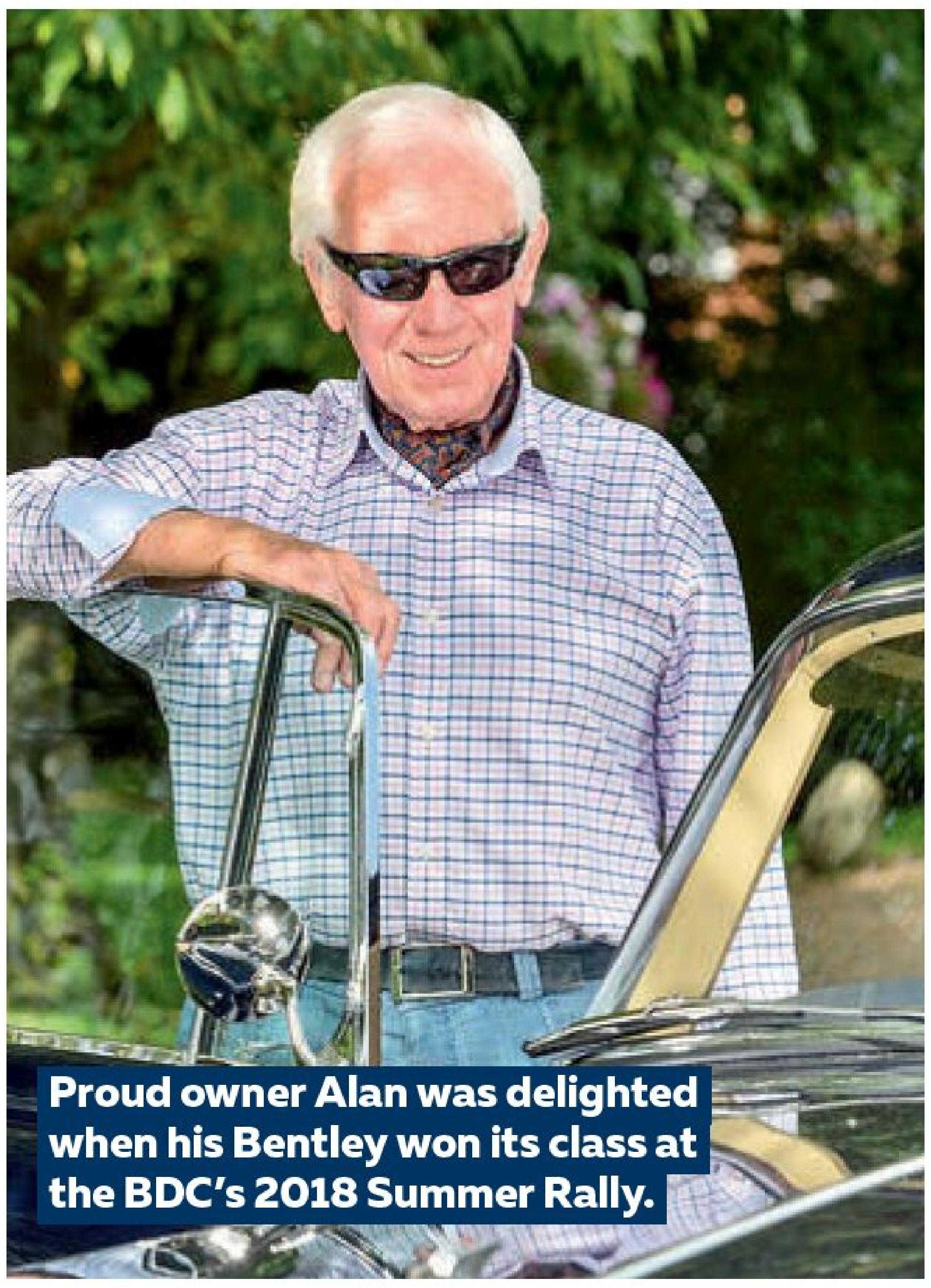
“During the decision-making process, Alan opted for a number of subtle but important upgrades”

being tried until Alan and Wendy finally found the one they liked above all others: Midnight Blue, a modern colour from the Volkswagen range, with just the merest hint of metallic content to help make it sparkle.

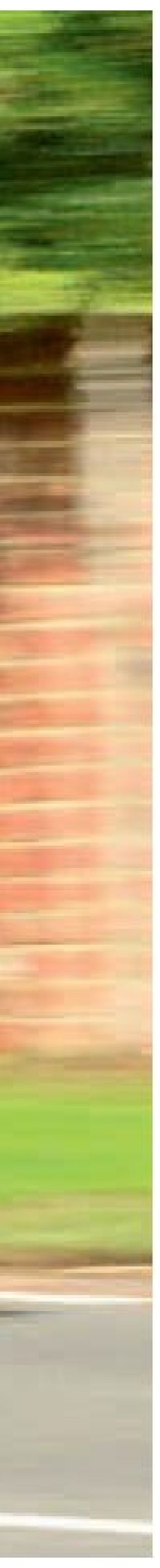
“I think it’s perfect for the car,” says Alan, “and I’ve never had an issue with it being a non-Bentley colour, although some traditionalists might not approve.” The paintwork itself was expertly applied by Surrey-based Calbrook Coachworks, who managed to achieve the high standard of finish that Alan was after. The engine bay, bulkhead and back of the bonnet were sprayed in the correct factory-finishing hue, with the Ranmore team then reinstating the car’s original 6230cc V8 and all ancillaries to a concours-like standard, demonstrating an exemplary level of engine bay detailing.

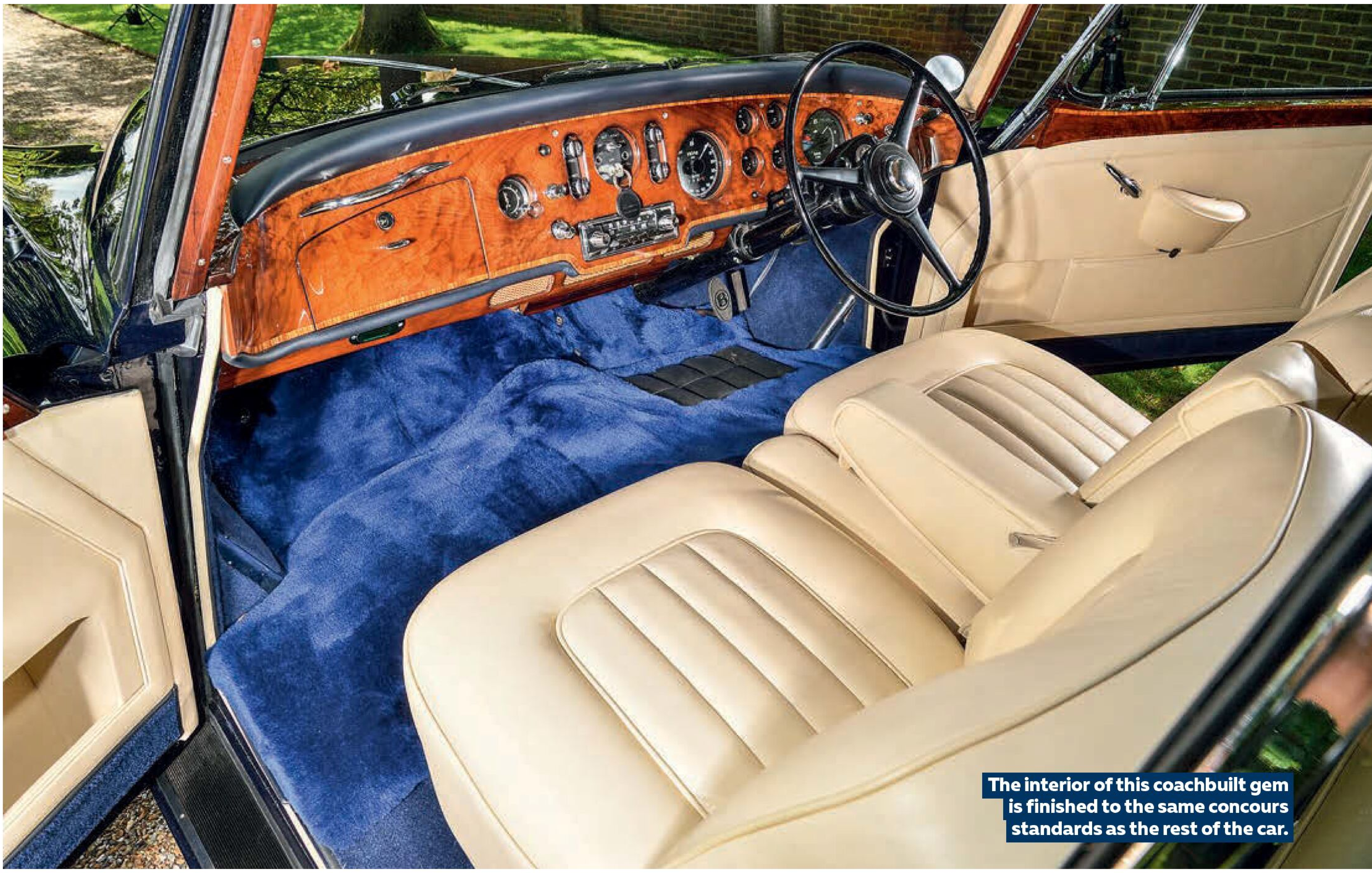
With attention turning to the interior, the Bentley’s extensive woodwork was sent to specialist Joe Crabtree for restoration, while Derby Plating was tasked with restoring the car’s hefty chromework. But Alan and Wendy faced another dilemma when it came to choosing the leather colour scheme, with the initial idea of magnolia with blue piping being dismissed as too modern looking. The cream-coloured Connolly Vaumol hide that was eventually decided upon does indeed



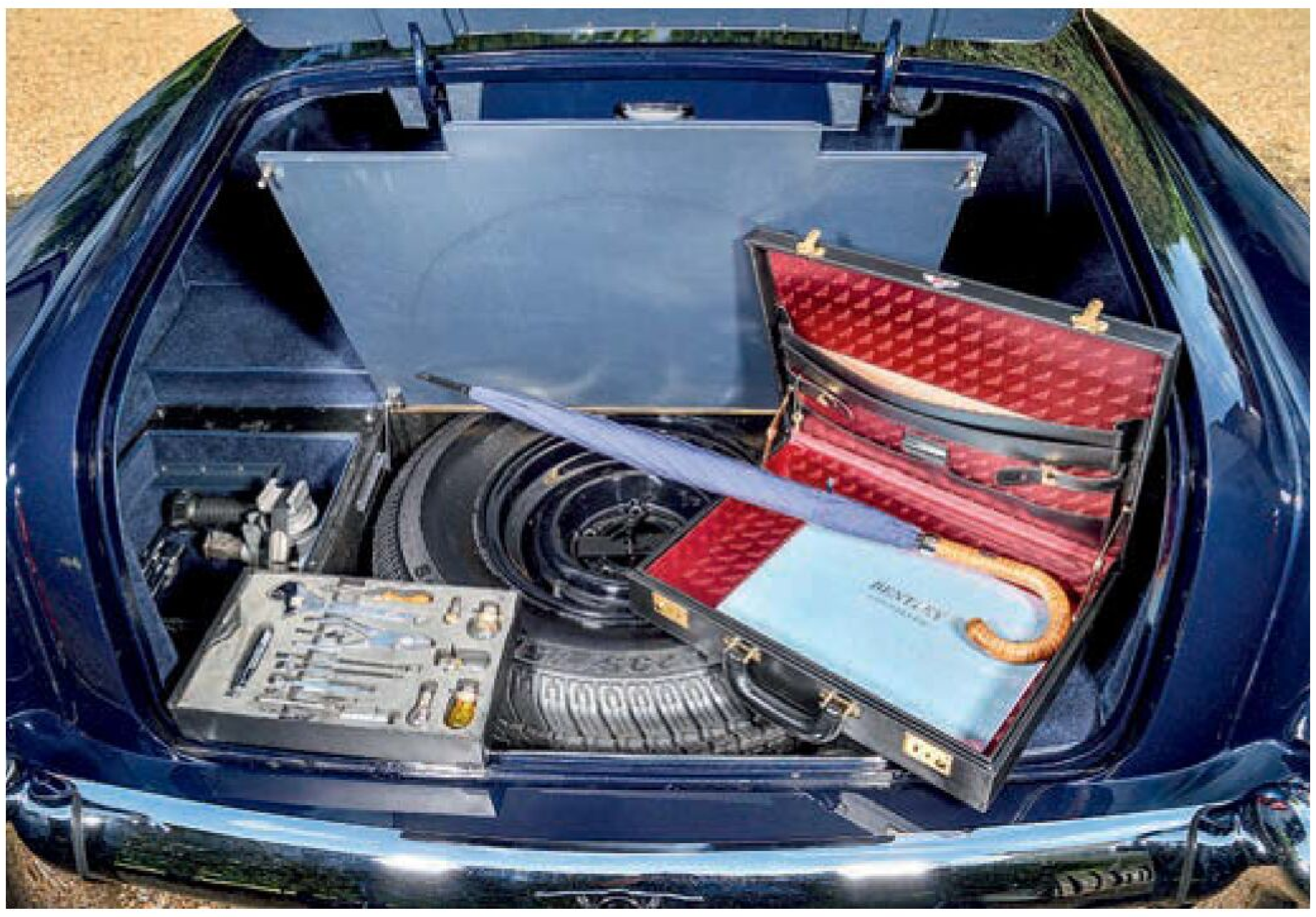


Proud owner Alan was delighted when his Bentley won its class at the BDC’s 2018 Summer Rally.





The interior of this coachbuilt gem is finished to the same concours standards as the rest of the car.



suit the car, as does the contrasting blue carpeting. The same carpet extends into the Bentley's generously proportioned boot, where you'll find the authentic and fully detailed tool kit that was also restored by Ranmore.

During the decision-making process, Alan opted for a number of subtle but important upgrades for the car, a list that included independently controlled heated seat pads, uprated electric window mechanisms, LED lighting for the boot and Dynamat soundproofing throughout. One particularly clever improvement though, was the installation of an air-conditioning system that involves no changes to the dashboard, thanks to the condenser being housed in the boot and the cold air being fed into the car through a pair of period-looking bullseye vents in the rear parcel shelf, as well as via a discreet centre grille.

From start to finish, the complete rejuvenation of this rather special Continental took around three and a half years: "Words alone cannot explain just how much care and attention went into the meticulous restoration," admits Alan, proud owner of one of the finest Bentleys of its type. The car was completed in time for the Bentley Drivers Club's 2018 Summer Rally & Concours d'Elegance, where the Bentley was judged to be the outright winner of its class – the ultimate reward for a man who had waited so long for his Continental-owning ambition to be fulfilled. ■

ABW 12

UNIQUE EXAMPLE

One man's quest to buy an early Bentley T-series some years ago saw him stumbling across this unique-spec model – a well-preserved survivor with an interesting bonus

"It was strange how it happened," recalled Godfrey Baillon-Bending at the time of our photo shoot during the RREC's Annual Rally of 2019. As he showed us around his remarkably well-preserved Bentley, Godfrey explained: "One day I woke up and said: 'I really must own a Silver Shadow II'. I didn't really know why, as I'd never before had anything earlier than a Silver Spirit, but there we are."

Godfrey's initial idea didn't exactly go to plan, however, as what he ended up with instead was an early example of the Bentley T-series: "I thought a late-model Silver Shadow II made the most sense. I'd always liked them and so I started doing some research, reading as much about the history of the model as I could. Gradually though, I began to see the appeal of an early car, especially when I read about something called the 'Chippendale' dashboard. Oh, and to make things even more difficult, I decided I wanted a Bentley version."

It's easy to see the appeal of the 'Chippendale' dashboard, a feature of the Silver Shadow and T-series at their launch in 1965. Left-hand drive cars saw the design phased out as early as 1968, although right-hand drive examples still used the original dashboard through to May '69. A completely redesigned dashboard was required thanks to changes in American safety legislation, hence the new-look version featuring extra padding as well as a rejigged instrument layout and a modern-looking centre console. The interior of the Silver Shadow and T-series had suddenly been updated for the impending new decade, which explains why the original 'Chippendale' design is the ultimate choice for many of today's marque purists.

Deciding on a particular model is relatively straightforward, but tracking down one that's not only for sale but also in decent condition is a different matter, as Godfrey was to find out when his search began in 2014: "I spotted various early T-series Bentleys for sale around the UK, and I went to see quite a few of them, travelling from my home in Essex to places like Hull, Manchester and Birmingham. I covered a lot of miles, but every car I went to see was nowhere near good enough. What had looked promising in photographs turned out to need lots of restoration work, with most of the cars having tatty bodywork, worn leather and other issues. I know I was being very particular about the car and spec I wanted, but I was determined to find the ideal example."

Such difficulties are understandable, given the relatively low production figures of the T-series. A total of 19,497 »

This much-loved survivor was structurally excellent when discovered by Godfrey, but cosmetically less impressive.

first-generation standard-wheelbase Silver Shadows were built (prior to the launch of the Silver Shadow II in 1977), compared with just 1712 examples of the equivalent T-series – which meant that fewer than 10 per cent of customers ordered the Bentley version during its 12 years on sale. By restricting his search to early T-series cars with the 'Chippendale' dashboard, however, Godfrey was chasing an even scarcer commodity – the Bentley equivalent of the proverbial 'needle in a haystack'.

LOCAL DISCOVERY

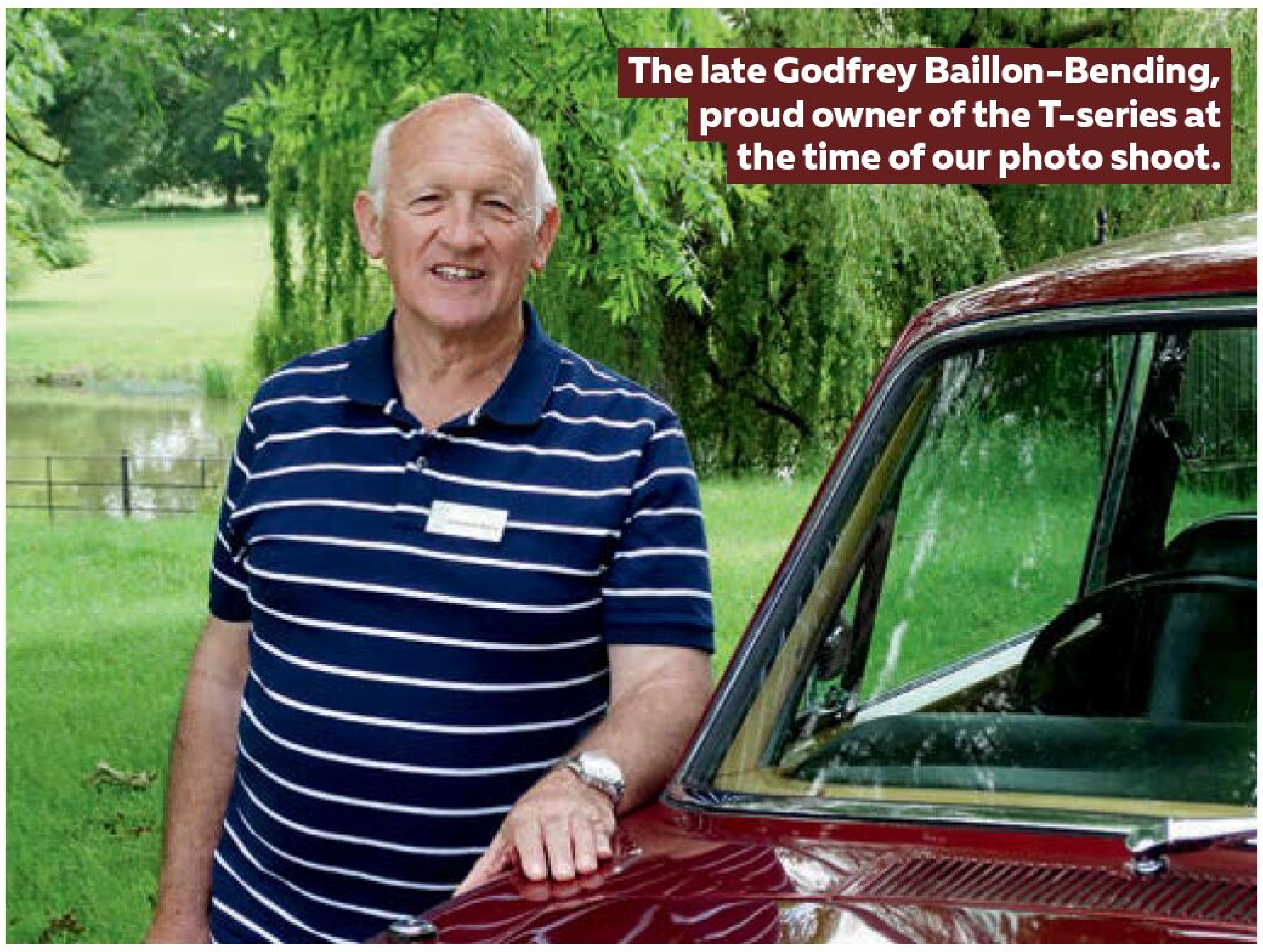
Prior to his various travels around the UK, Godfrey had spotted a 1967 T-series for sale relatively locally but had dismissed it because of the poorly worded advert and grim-looking photography: "The advert didn't read well at all, and told me nothing about the car. And there were just a couple of really poor photographs, which didn't give any idea about its condition. I didn't bother enquiring about it for ages as I was busy travelling around looking at others. In the end, though, almost out of desperation, I rang the seller and arranged to go and see the Bentley, which was only a few miles from home."

The T-series had been in the hands of the same elderly owner since 1997, a gentleman who was by now in poor health, hence the car being offered for sale by one of his employees. Godfrey was delighted to see that the workshop where the car was stored contained a four-post ramp, and so he asked if he could use it to have a proper look around the underside of the Bentley: "As soon as I could get underneath the car, I could see that it was covered in oil – but not because of any leaks. It turns out that the owner, who was a retired engineer, had regularly covered the entire underside in old engine oil, which had worked wonders in keeping it free of any corrosion. There wasn't any rot at all."

The same long-term owner had also spent money on mechanical maintenance, with the Bentley having been treated to fully rebuilt hydraulics and brakes, as well as regular servicing. Suddenly, this 56,000-mile example of an early T-series was starting to look like a promising prospect, despite the fact that it was cosmetically less than perfect: "There was no obvious rot anywhere, but the paintwork left plenty to be desired," recalled Godfrey. "There was a crease in one of the rear doors, and in various places the paintwork had been polished so much that it was down to the primer. I managed to see through this, though, as everything else was so good. The chrome looked original and well-preserved, and the interior was also

“It’s easy to see the appeal of the ‘Chippendale’ dashboard, a feature of the T-series at its launch in 1965”

Early examples of the T-series featured the V8 engine in the same 6.2-litre guise as their predecessors.



The late Godfrey Baillon-Bending, proud owner of the T-series at the time of our photo shoot.

impressive but in need of a clean.”

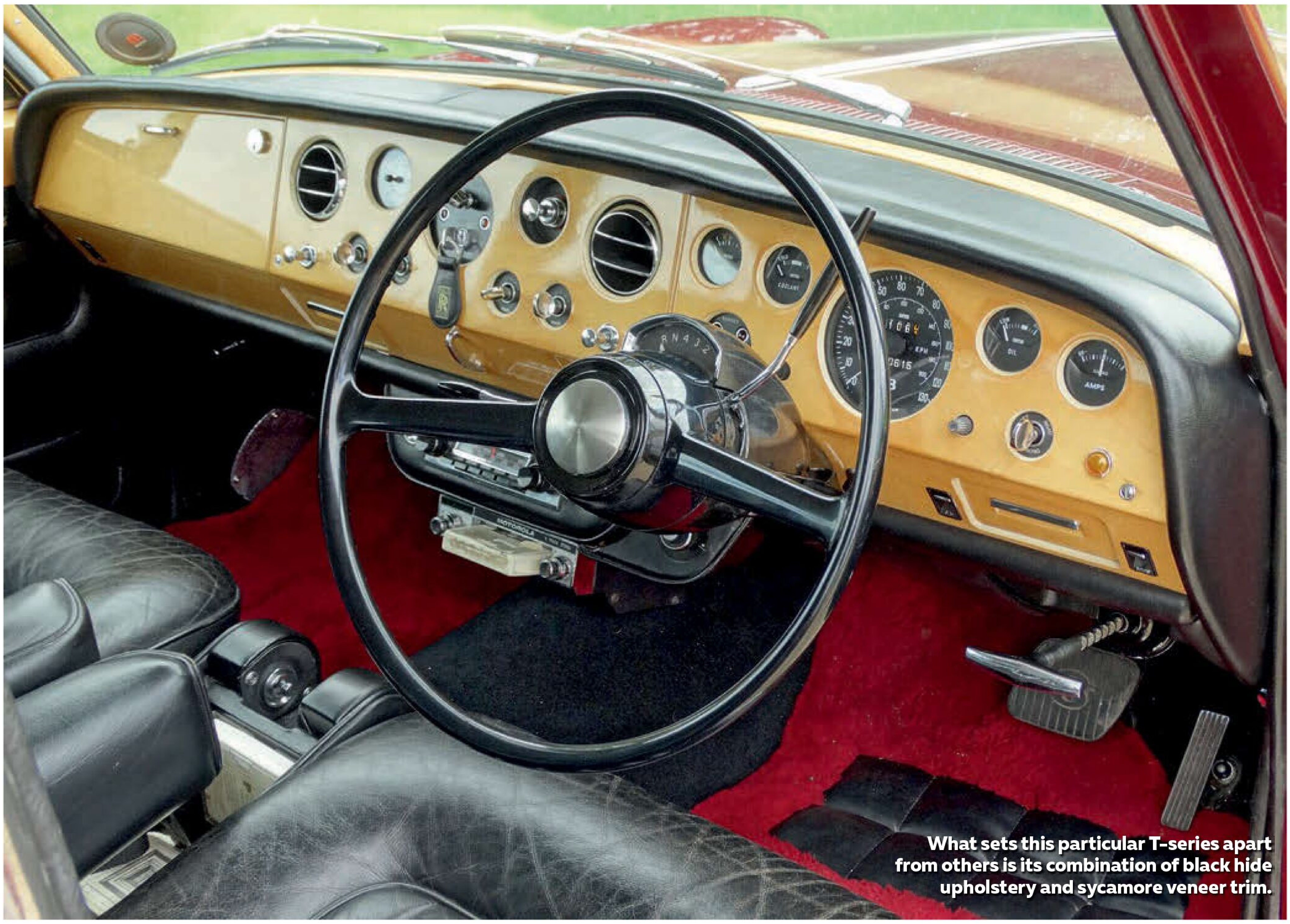
Indeed, it is the interior of this particular T-series that sets it apart from its contemporaries, thanks to its combination of black hide upholstery and sycamore veneer trim: “As soon as I saw the veneer, I just loved it,” Godfrey told us when we met. “The Bentley’s first owner specifically ordered the car with sycamore veneer, and I’ve yet to see another one like it. In fact, I’ve been told that only two cars were ever finished with sycamore, the other one being a Silver Spirit. If that’s true, it makes mine a unique member of the SY-generation family.”

BARGAIN BUY

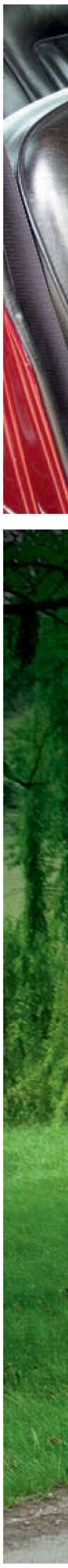
So taken was he with the Bentley, Godfrey went to see it three times to make sure it was as good as his first impressions suggested, finally agreeing to buy the car on his third visit. And although he didn’t have a particular budget in mind, Godfrey admitted to us that it was a bargain, despite the fact he’d need to spend extra money improving its aesthetics: “Within about four months of buying the Bentley, I asked a friend with a spray shop to respray it for me in its original shade of Regal Red. There’s » a touch more fleck in the paint than it would have had originally, but it's the right colour – and I think the end finish suits it really well. I was very pleased with what was achieved."

Godfrey then spent time bringing the car's interior up to scratch, thoroughly cleaning the original leather and polishing the sycamore veneer woodwork, chrome switches and so on. Attention to detail was the key, enabling Godfrey to transform what was already a well-presented car. Glance inside now and the first thing you notice is the lightness of the sycamore veneer used on the dashboard, door cappings and rear picnic tables, all of it in impeccable condition. It contrasts wonderfully with the black leather used throughout, with the front seats' ever-so-slight patination confirming the originality of the hide.

This particular T-series was fitted with extra-cost air conditioning from new, with the car's first owner paying an extra £135 for the privilege



What sets this particular T-series apart from others is its combination of black hide upholstery and sycamore veneer trim.



according to the paperwork that Godfrey has. It also features a fully-working Motorola 8-Track stereo player just beneath the dashboard, ideal for those times when you fancy a change from the built-in Radiomobile.

At the time of our photo shoot, Godfrey had owned his T-series for five years, during which time it had well and truly lived up to expectations. "It's been an absolute joy to own," he told us with a smile. "Although its mileage is still only around the 60,000 mark, I do use the car on a regular basis. I find it such a pleasure to drive, and my wife says it's the most comfortable car to ride in the back of. To be honest, I can't imagine ever parting with it now."

Sadly, Godfrey is no longer with us, having passed away some years after his car was originally featured in *Rolls-Royce & Bentley Driver* magazine. We hope that by including it in this Bentley-focused publication, it will be a fitting tribute to a genuine enthusiast and what was his particularly interesting early T-series. ■

"Godfrey went to see the Bentley three times to make sure it was as good as his first impressions suggested"

BUILDING THE BEST

We take a trip to Brooklands to meet the man whose Bentley Corniche is almost certainly the finest survivor of its kind, after being restored to an exemplary standard

Bentleys and Brooklands… the two just go together so well. The 1907 home of British motorsport (and aviation) will forever be associated with the marque, as well as the 'Bentley Boys' who raced their magnificent machines at the banked Surrey track. So, while making arrangements to meet up with Chris Chambers to sample his sensational 1976 Bentley Corniche Series IA, Brooklands seemed the obvious choice for our photo shoot.

London-based companies director Chris has become a bit of a 'Bentley Boy' himself since acquiring his Corniche in 2012; purchasing, driving and rebuilding it ultimately inspired him to buy three other classic examples, which he was in the process of having restored to the same high standard at the time of our meeting. Meanwhile, the Corniche IA probably needs some explanation, since it's a far from common model.

When the Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow and its Bentley T-series sister were launched in 1965, they were soon joined by two-door saloons from Mulliner Park Ward (Rolls-Royce's in-house coachbuilder) and James Young, with a convertible variant of the former coming along a year later. James Young exited the scene in 1967, leaving the MPW machines – with their distinctive and very fashionable 'Coke bottle' rear wing styling – to dominate the market.

In 1971, to further distinguish the two-door cars from the standard saloons, the name Corniche was bestowed on them. This was a revival of a pre-war Bentley title, but despite the moniker being more Winged-B than Spirit of Ecstasy, Bentley versions of the post-war Corniche were very few and far between thanks to Rolls-Royce being the dominant partner in the marriage of the marques by the 1960s and '70s.

Company policy at the time was to fit any new upgrades and enhancements »

The intention was to create the best example of its type, something that has been well and truly achieved.

> “In 1971, to further distinguish the two-door cars from the standard saloons, the name Corniche was bestowed on them”

to Corniches first, before filtering them down to the standard saloons, which is how Chris' Series IA variant came to be. Registered in July 1976, just before the switch to the Series II Corniche, it was a transitional machine incorporating many of the modifications of the second-generation cars – such as the split-level air-conditioning, later dashboard and instrumentation, and rack-and-pinion steering, but without the chunky safety-conscious Series II alloy and rubber bumpers which, at least aesthetically, few regarded as an improvement.

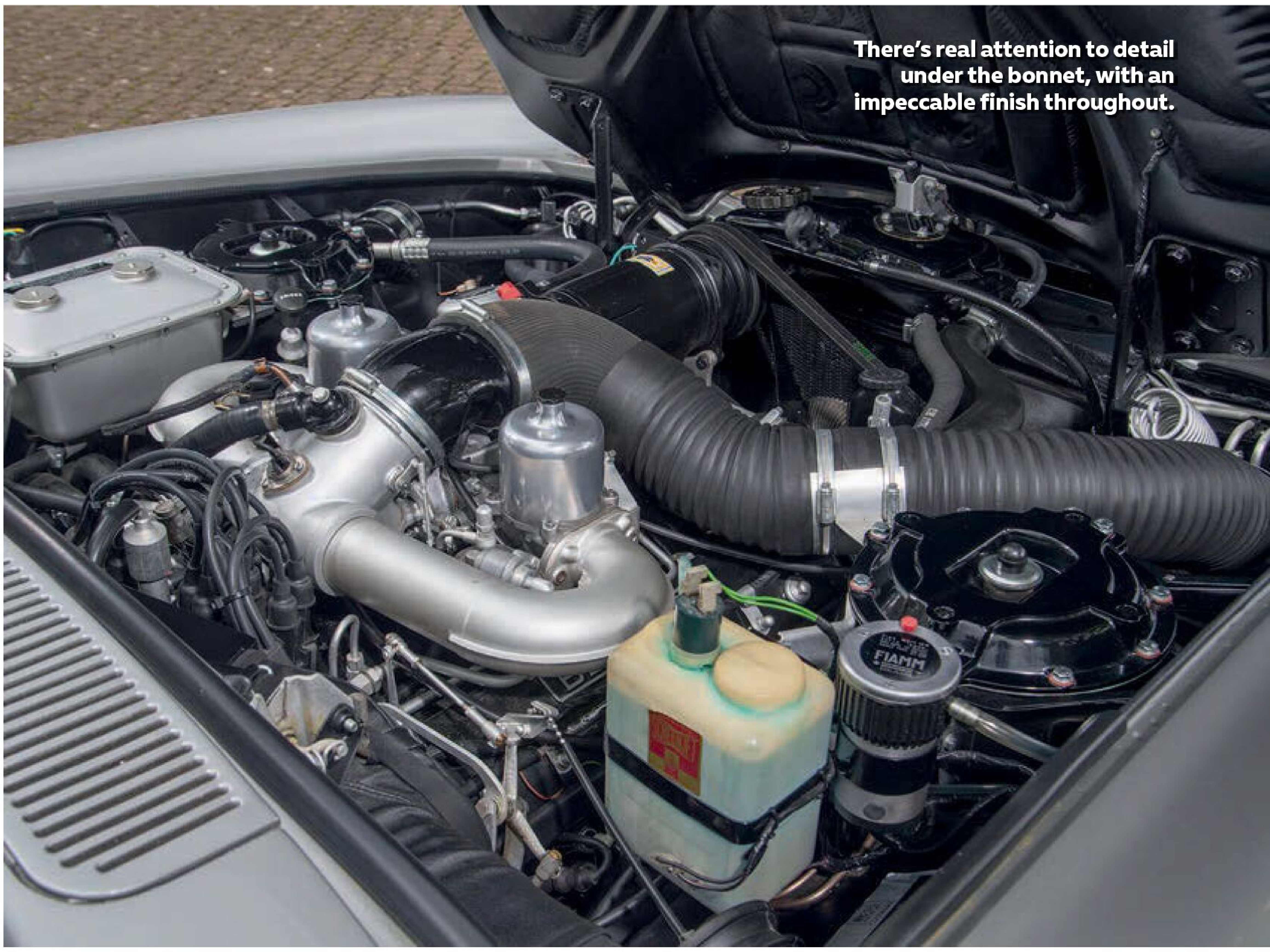
Think of it as the best of both worlds: “It has all the facets of the later model, with the traditional old chrome,” says Chris. “I think they only made about three Bentleys in this form, so it's quite a rare car.” He has since found out that it (or at least its chassis number) was featured in several Rolls-Royce manuals because, as a IA, it was the first of its kind to feature the alterations that would become stock on the Series IIs.

FINDING THE CAR

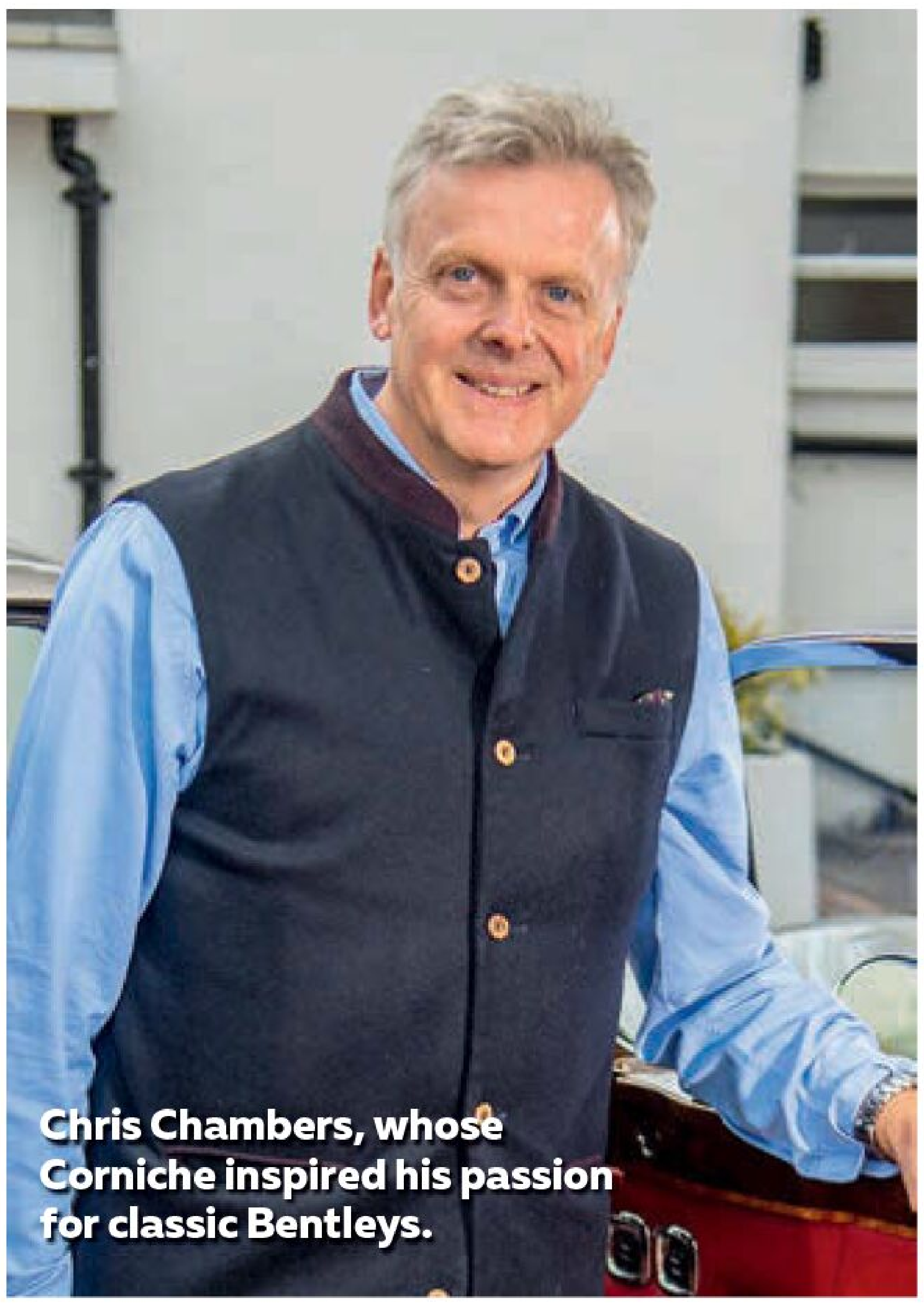
It was around 13 years ago that Chris acquired his Corniche. Although he had a small collection of other prestige cars, none of them were Bentleys, but that was about to change. “It was this car that got me into Bentleys; it's almost become a bit uncontrolled since then,” he jokes. So, what was the attraction? He remembers some of his father's friends owning them when he was growing up, but there was more to it than that: “I wanted to pick a classic that was not yet so well-appreciated that it had become a big collectors' piece. The Shadow's reputation was still quite poor in 2012, but I took the view that this had to change.”

It was specifically a Series IA Corniche that Chris wanted, because of its cocktail of older appearance and more advanced running gear and interior appointments, and he eventually found this example at what is now known as Ranmore Service & Engineering, based in Surrey. “I went with my daughter to see it, took one look and thought 'It's a great car, I'll have it'. I bought it on the spot”. The Bentley was in very good condition, but after 102,000 miles and 36 years, there were inevitably some blemishes and issues that could be improved. So, after a few years of using it regularly and enjoying it, Chris decided it was time to create the perfect Corniche that he really craved: “I took the view that, even though there was nothing massively wrong with it, in order for it to survive the next fifty or sixty years and be an exceptional car, it deserved to have a full engine-out, subframe-out, body-off rebuild.”

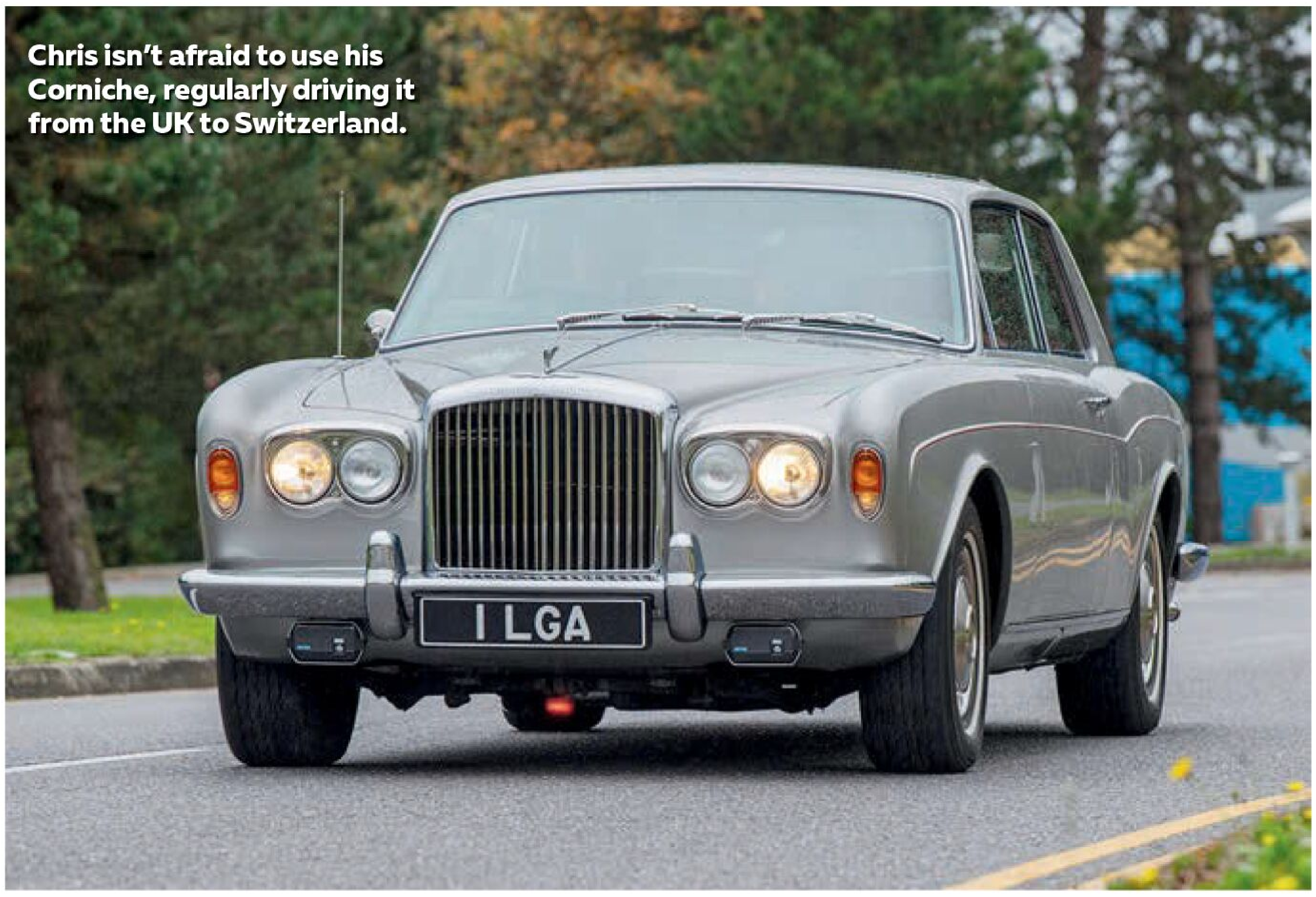
The company Chris chose in 2018 for the painstaking job was Rolls-Royce and Bentley specialist Hillier Hill, based in Buckinghamshire. “Ray Hillier and I went through a long list of things that might possibly want to be looked at and decided that a full, no-holds-barred restoration was the way forward.” This encompassed taking the body back to bare metal and attending to all the mechanical aspects of the car, including overhauling the running gear and rebuilding the engine



There's real attention to detail under the bonnet, with an impeccable finish throughout.



Chris Chambers, whose Corniche inspired his passion for classic Bentleys.



Chris isn't afraid to use his Corniche, regularly driving it from the UK to Switzerland.

and gearbox. Inside, the vibrant red leather (one of the more distinctive and eye-catching features of this Corniche) and the wood were removed and refurbished to exacting standards.

Where possible, effort was taken to have original parts restored rather than replaced: "Where we did replace bits, we were often lucky enough to get the last items from Crewe," recalls Chris. For example, there was the heated rear screen, which had started to de-laminate and go milky. "We located probably the last Pilkington original Corniche heated rear window going. There was no limit to things. We had the build sheets for the car from 1976, so we knew exactly what had gone into it; the leather, the wood, and so on. All the chrome was sent away and redone by Derby Plating Services, so the brightwork is now exceptional."

Chris and Hillier Hill's attention to originality even included keeping the Blaupunkt radio and Pioneer cassette player. Was there any temptation to go for a more modern sound set-up at all? "No, not even for a nanosecond," laughs Chris. "They were in the build-spec of the car, so I wanted to keep »

The vibrant red leather interior was fully stripped and renovated as part of the major project.

them. And I've still got the Rolls-Royce cassette that teaches you how to use the system." However, there were a couple of choice improvements made, including the paint shade: "The car was initially Bentley Shell Grey, but I had it finished in Ferrari Grigio Notte. It's an incredibly subtle change, and you'd have to be a real aficionado to spot it. The problem with the Bentley Shell Grey is that on a dull day the colour just sinks, while the Ferrari shade doesn't. It just raises the car, makes it better to look at, and interacts with the chrome a bit more. I thought that if I'm going to have this car for the rest of my life, then I'd like it in my own colour. So, it's the only Bentley Corniche in Ferrari Grigio Notte."

Upgraded Lobro driveshafts, as found on post-1983 Silver Spirits, were also fitted to overcome the tendency of the original Silver Shadow components to wear out, resulting in vibration and noise most unbecoming of such a prestigious vehicle.

BLAUPUNKT
STEREO
SPEAKER BALANCE
FASTEN SEAT BELTS

The interior wood was removed and restored to the highest standards by specialists.

POWER BRAKE 1
POWER BRAKE
PARKING BRAKE
BRAKE FLUID
ENGINE OVERHEAT
LOW COOLANT
WASHER FLUID
STOP LAMP
ICE
LOW FUEL
PARK
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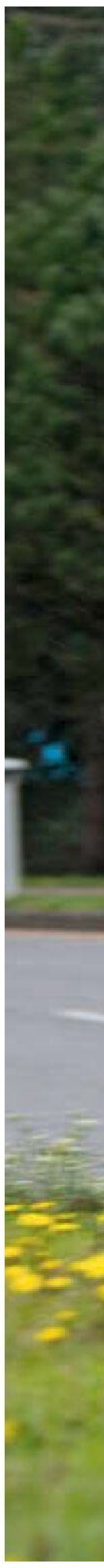


The entire restoration took two years, and the stunning end result can be seen in the photographs: "I have to take my hat off to Hillier Hill," says Chris, "as they did an absolutely outstanding job. The attention to detail was spectacular. Even after the restoration, we then spent six to eight months where they painstakingly went through every single piece that needed slight adjustment, to get it all completely spot-on." He cites the way the doors close as an aspect he's particularly pleased with: "These are heavy panels, and the hinges often wear. They're difficult to get right. But now, to close a door, it's just one gentle push and clunk. It just glides and closes."

CLOSE TO CONCOURS

In Chris' opinion, this rare two-door Bentley is now about as close to a 100-point concours d'elegance car as you're likely to see. However, concours events were never part of his thinking: "I'm not into showing cars, I'm into using them, but I like to know myself that all my cars are as good as they can possibly be."

Even given the Corniche's exemplary standard of finish, Chris isn't afraid to make full use of the car. He's half-Swiss, half-English, and so has another house away from London, in Switzerland. "It's not precious. I drive the Corniche there, going over 12,000-feet mountain passes, and it performs absolutely impeccably. As great as it is to look at, it's the most wonderful machine to drive. For a car that's the best part of fifty years old, it's incredibly comfortable; the fable that the only thing you hear inside a Rolls-Royce is the clock is totally true. It's silent and just drifts and wafts along. It's a very usable car. I think one of the mistakes that people make with classics is to cocoon them away, because they're too precious. And it's no good for the car. A good friend of mine, a specialist, once told me that the best service you can give your car is to drive it regularly. They need to be used."

In fact, so enamoured is Chris with his Corniche that he much prefers it to some of his 21st century vehicles. "It's a joy – it turns a mundane journey into something special. When I go to Switzerland, it takes about twelve hours in a new Range Rover. It probably takes an hour or two longer in the Bentley, but it's much, much more enjoyable. It also gets a lot of looks when you stop for petrol in France or Switzerland, or when you're going down the motorway; people wind their windows down and start taking photographs, which always feels a bit odd."

So delighted is Chris with his sensational Corniche, his plan is to never part company with it: "I took the view that it deserved to have everything thrown at it, to give it the chance of probably being best in breed for decades to come. It's now fit for the next fifty or sixty years and, even when I'm no longer around, it will still be a really lovely example." ■

"The problem with the Bentley Shell Grey is that on a dull day the colour just sinks, while the Ferrari shade doesn't"

CORNICHE
1 LGA

NEW POWER GENERATION

With the turbocharger transforming Bentley's sales and image in the 1980s and '90s, a process that began with the Mulsanne Turbo, we examine the marque's hugely successful reinvention

Replacing the T2 and Silver Shadow in 1980 was in many ways an unenviable task, not helped by the limited funds (by global motor industry standards) of Rolls-Royce Motors at the time. New-car development didn't come cheap, which is why the next generation would inevitably use their predecessors' platform, powerplant and running gear. And of course, there were question marks over whether a Bentley version was worth doing at all, given how overlooked the marque had become by the vast majority of Crewe's clientele by then.

Happily, the decision to launch a Bentley derivative was made, with Rolls-Royce Motors revealing at the new SZ generation's official press launch that it was to be called Mulsanne – a name with obvious motorsport connotations, despite the fact that it was simply a Silver Spirit in all but name (and radiator grille). Indeed, at first glance the new Mulsanne appeared to be even more of a badge-engineering exercise than the T2 before it.

In Graham Hull's fascinating book, *Inside the Rolls-Royce & Bentley*

Styling Department 1971-2001 (Veloce, 2014), the company's former styling chief describes how costs were kept to a minimum when developing the new Bentley: "Although the SY had a specially-shaped bonnet to match the rounded corners at the back of the Bentley 'header tank', the funds were not available to do this for SZ. The radiator shell was styled to look right from the front with a slight mismatch at the back – a compromise that later came home to roost when MD Peter Ward pointed out the mistake to me."

In keeping with the SY generation, the new Mulsanne got off to what could politely be called a discreet start, totally overshadowed by its Silver Spirit sibling. But Rolls-Royce management remained dedicated to Bentley, with engineers working on a reinvention of the marque that would officially get under way in 1982 with the launch of the Mulsanne Turbo. Interestingly though, the normally aspirated Mulsanne remained in production right through to 1987, still available to order even after the launch of the new entry-level Bentley Eight of 1984, and would remain so until the arrival of the Mulsanne S three years later. Despite its seven-year career, however, sales of the standard Mulsanne were never spectacular, with just 531 sold worldwide by the time production ceased in 1987. By comparison, the Mulsanne Turbo almost matched that figure in only three years.

> **"The Mulsanne got off to what could politely be called a discreet start, overshadowed by its Silver Spirit sibling"**

TURBO TRANSFORMATION

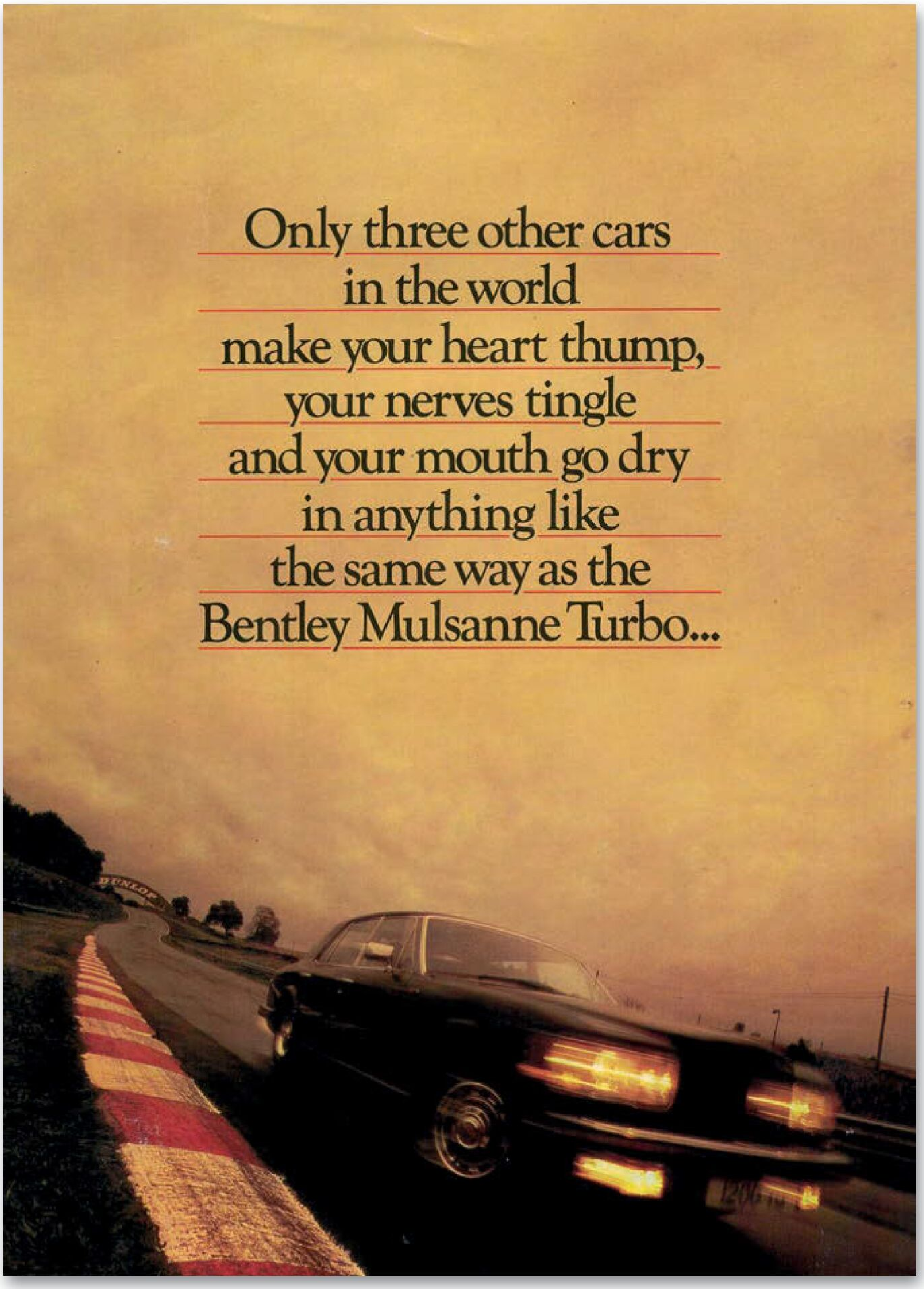
"Simply massive" was how *Autocar* summed up the Mulsanne Turbo in its first road test of this unlikely new performance hero back in '82. And it's a phrase that neatly sums up the entire vehicle: simple, massive... but with an almighty kick that back then hadn't previously been found in a saloon of such size. It may have started out as a not-entirely-serious side project, but once developed into a production model, the appeal of the go-faster Mulsanne and the subsequent Turbo R effectively created an entirely new market segment. More than that, though, it single-handedly ensured the revival of the long-sidelined Bentley marque.

It's widely assumed that development of the Turbo began as a means of differentiating the Mulsanne from the Silver Spirit, but in fact work started a decade before the wraps came off the new car. According to marque »

The original non-turbo Mulsanne of 1980 was a simple badge-engineering exercise.

Turbocharging the Mulsanne in 1982 put Bently firmly back in the performance car market.

“Plastow didn’t even give Broadspeed a budget, and when the car was returned six months later it came with a bill for £7000”



historians, it was back in 1973 that Rolls-Royce Motors’ managing director, David Plastow, approached engineering chief John Hollings with an idea that now seems remarkably forward-thinking. With an eye to the future, he wanted to invest in preparing the company to embrace new technology.

One of these ideas was turbocharging, which was certainly a brave move; back then, BMW’s 2002 Turbo had yet to be unveiled, meaning there wasn’t a single turbocharged production car on the European market. Undeterred by Hollings’ reluctance and encouraging him with words along the lines of “Oh come on, let’s have some fun”, Plastow procured a tired Silver Shadow development car and sent it off to the motorsport supremos at Broadspeed.

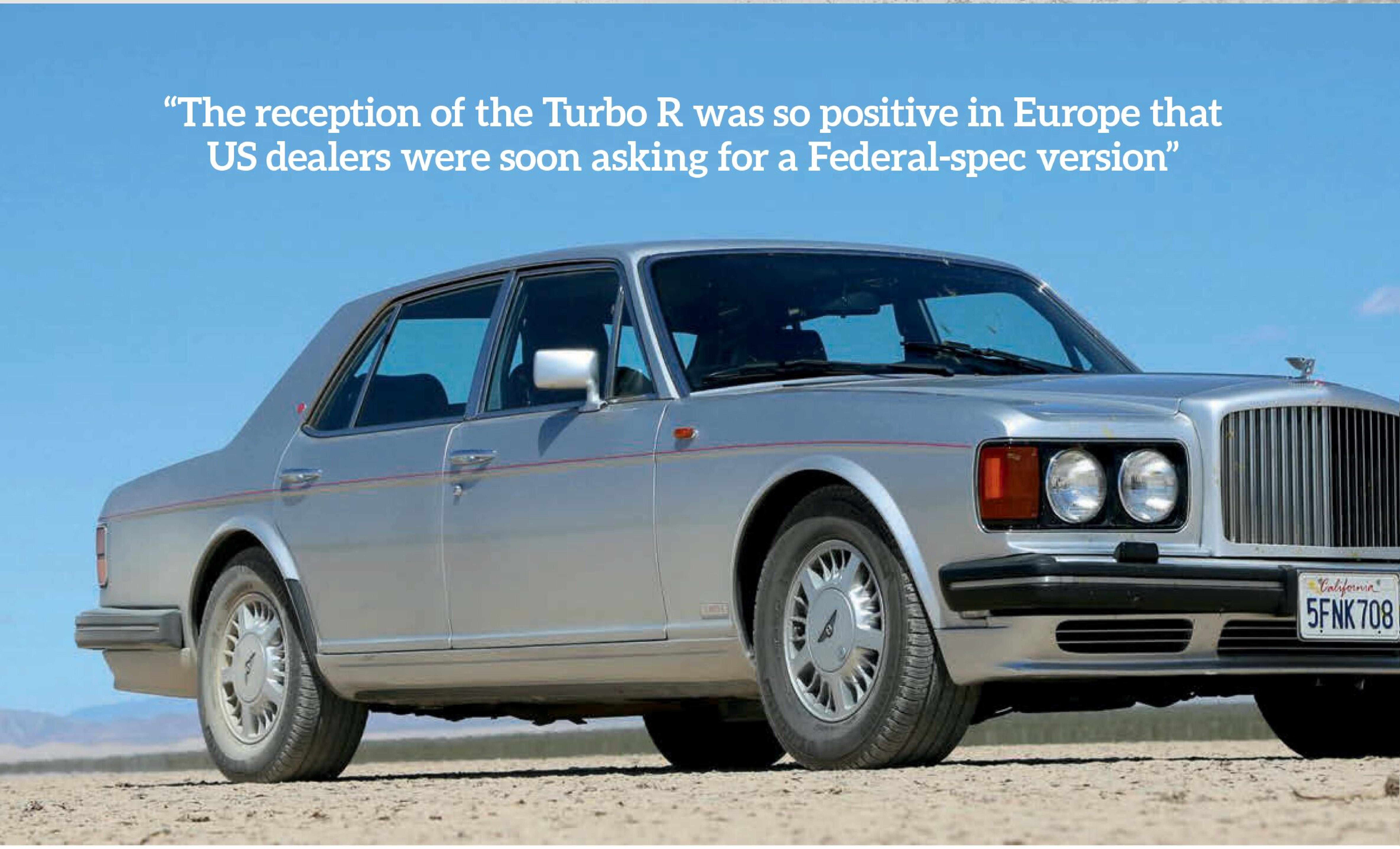
Plastow reportedly didn’t even give Broadspeed a budget, and when the car was returned six months later it came with a bill for £7000 – a hefty sum in 1973. Reports from the time suggest the installation was crude but effective, the car lacking in refinement but being brutally quick in a straight line. Considering the development prototype was a slightly shabby Silver Shadow, piloting it would have been a memorable experience.

With the basics sorted by Broadspeed, Rolls-Royce took the project in-house and quickly began gaining expertise in the science of turbocharging. The design was evolved with eventual production in mind, with the team concentrating on such areas as refinement and underbonnet heat. A second prototype was created in 1977 using a pre-production Camargue, and at this stage it was realised that the original installation with the twin-SU carburettors wouldn’t flow sufficient air; a four-barrel Solex was therefore used instead, as already found on the Camargue and Corniche. Sadly, the fuel-injected engine developed for US-market cars couldn’t satisfy both the fuelling requirements of the forced-induction engine and the emissions requirements of the more restrictive export markets, meaning any turbocharged model couldn’t initially be sold in Australia, Japan or North America.

In its final production form, the new engine boasted some 50 per cent more power than the normally aspirated V8, something which was only revealed when new regulations in the German market required the peak power figures to be published. Crewe had traditionally been coy about numbers, but official figures revealed that the turbocharged V8 produced 298bhp at 3000rpm compared with the regular version’s 199bhp.

Even at this point the firm still fought shy of revealing torque figures, which was perhaps a shame since the monstrous twist was really the key to the car’s sledgehammer performance, with the 2234kg saloon now cracking 60mph in just seven seconds in the hands of *Autocar* magazine, topping out at 142mph. For comparison, the »

> “The reception of the Turbo R was so positive in Europe that US dealers were soon asking for a Federal-spec version”



regular Mulsanne posted figures of ten seconds and 129mph.

THE EVOLUTION

The new car was launched as the Bentley Mulsanne Turbo at the Geneva Motor Show in 1982, the package consisting of the turbocharged drivetrain, a discreet Turbo plaque on the bootlid, a body-coloured grille surround and… well, that was it. The mighty Citroën-inspired high-pressure brakes with their four front calipers had stopping power in reserve for the uprated engine, but the suspension was a different matter. With the springs and dampers unchanged from the regular Mulsanne and Silver Spirit, the Turbo was stunningly quick in a straight line, but road testers of the day were alarmed by its handling.

With a kerb weight of 2.2 tonnes, a high centre of gravity and the potential to arrive into corners rather quicker than anyone had a right to expect, the Mulsanne Turbo proved to be a handful. *Autocar* testers gave the car a meagre two stars for handling in its early road test, pointing out that the Turbo was now asking “questions it was never intended to answer” of the chassis. The magazine continued with its criticism: “To be blunt, throw the Turbo into even a smooth consistent-radius bend with enthusiasm and you’ll wish you hadn’t.” The same testers reckoned the steering was too light and devoid of feel, while the understeer and body roll built up alarmingly at even modest speeds. In the wet, they found that the dogged understeer could turn into tail-out oversteer all too easily.

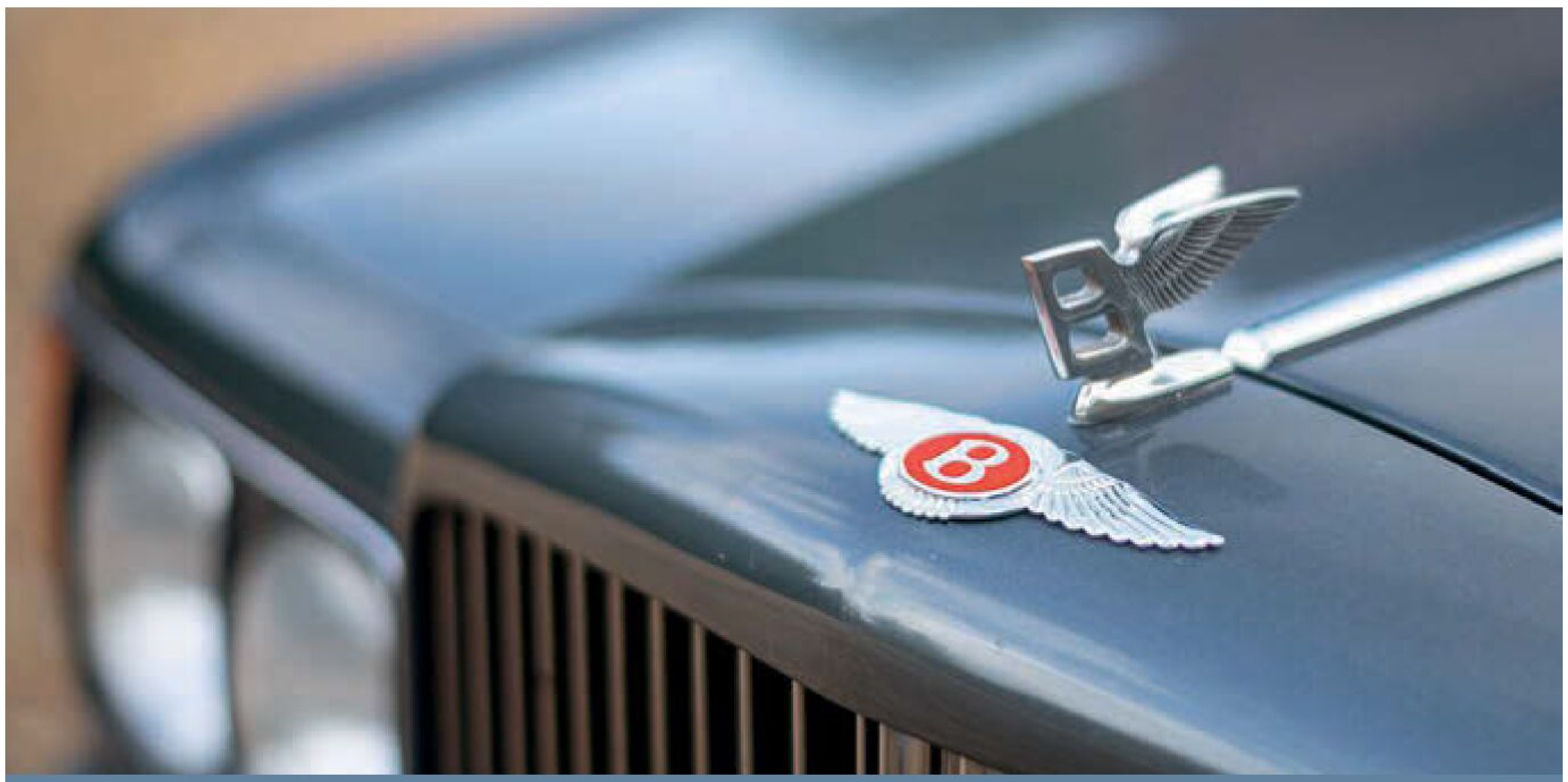
The team at Crewe was acutely aware of the Turbo’s deficiencies in handling, but had simply lacked

TURBO
BENTLEY

the resources to develop a revised suspension at the same time as the new engine. Knowing the turbocharged performance would make the headlines, it opted to introduce the new engine first and deal with the consequences later, no doubt knowing that in the real world their customers would seldom explore the car's cornering limits.

A partial solution came in July 1984 with the launch of the cheaper Bentley Eight, a model intended as a less overtly luxurious and more affordable entry-level offering with more sporting appeal. Tasked with luring younger buyers into the Bentley fold, it offered stiffer chassis settings, which proved that the basic SZ platform could be made to handle confidently. This, however, remained available only on the Eight.

Marque historians generally credit this to the innate concern for ride quality at Crewe, something that made the engineers forever hesitant of firming up the underpinnings. When John Hollings was replaced by new engineering chief Mike Dunn in 1983, however, he took decisive action. After trying what had been developed as a proposed uprated suspension, he immediately insisted »



UNDER THE BONNET

The production version of the turbocharged V8 was very similar in principle to the installation engineered by Ralph Broad and his team on that first Silver Shadow prototype, albeit refined in detail. Central to the installation was a massive Garrett AiResearch T04B turbocharger sited on the offside of the engine bay. The more elegant solution with a vee-configuration engine is to use a pair of smaller turbos; but despite the bulk of the car, the underbonnet space was too cramped to allow this, hence the use of a larger single unit.

The turbo was mounted in the offside of the engine bay, fed directly from the exhaust manifold of the right-hand cylinder bank and with a crossover pipe feeding it from the nearside bank. The installation was a 'blow-through' type, with the Solex carburettor mounted inside a hefty cast aluminium airbox that was bolted closed around its perimeter to maintain the 7psi boost pressure. What the modern car tuning world now refers to as a dump valve was mounted on the side of the air box to vent boost air back into the intake side of the compressor when the throttle was snapped shut.

Boost control was achieved via a mechanical wastegate, which used an unusual activation method, being operated by vacuum from the pump which also supplied the cruise control bellows, according to a signal from the electronic speedometer. This was set to reduce turbo boost above speeds of 135mph in the interests of preserving the tyres.

Over-boost protection was further ensured by the boost recirculation valve automatically opening if boost pressure exceeded 8psi. A high-pressure Bosch fuel pump was used to ensure that fuel pressure was always 4psi above the pressure inside the sealed airbox, in order to prevent fuel being blown back out of the carburettor under full boost.

In the interests of reducing lag and detonation under boost, the turbocharged engine was based around the lower 8.0:1 compression unit used for US-market cars and ran special aluminium pistons with steel inserts to counter the effects of differential expansion between the pistons and cast iron cylinder liners. Uprated inlet valves and valve springs were also fitted, as was an oil cooler. To further guard against the damaging effects of detonation, a Lucas electronic ignition system was used which incorporated a knock sensor to retard the timing by as much as 8 degrees.

Elsewhere, a larger-diameter exhaust was fitted, complete with twin tailpipes, and the torque converter in the GM gearbox was uprated to a six-bolt fitting. A taller final drive was also fitted in conjunction with uprated rear axle componentry, including 34mm halfshafts, larger CV joints and sliding spline hubs.

on the settings being stiffened by as much again. The horrified development team duly obliged and turned in a package using a 100 per cent stiffer front anti-roll bar, a 60 per cent uprated rear bar, firmer dampers with uprated rebound, a 50 pr cent firmer power-steering set-up, and a Panhard rod to reduce sideways movement of the rear subframe. To these changes were added lightweight 15-inch alloy wheels shod with 275/55 tyres and a deeper front spoiler to create the model marketed as the Turbo R in 1985… with that 'R' apparently standing for 'Roadholding'.

The car was transformed, with *Autocar* commenting that the Turbo R could now be driven through S-bends much more tidily, while the lift-off oversteer was much reduced. They concluded that the car was now "a marvellous experience to hurry down a truly open, lonely country road… to be travelling so quickly in so big a car." It wasn't perfect, though, with road testers describing the ride as "surprisingly knobbly" on the optional newly-developed Pirelli P7s, while they also found the steering fidgety on heavily-cambered roads.

The reception of the Turbo R was so positive in Europe that US dealers were soon asking for a Federal-spec version, and so work began in 1988 to make the turbocharged V8 emissions-compliant. This was achieved largely by replacing the Solex carburettor with Bosch fuel injection, in this case the part-electronic KE-Jetronic system that was already used by Ford on its turbocharged Escorts.

The opportunity was also taken to revise other aspects of the installation, with a new ignition set-up effectively working as two separate systems complete with two coils and two distributors. An air-to-air intercooler was added to the mix and suddenly the engine was not only US-market compliant but also boasted 330bhp.

Better tyres allowed the speed limiter to be removed and the big Bentley could now top out at 143mph. A slight icing on the cake – and it was very slight – was that the injected turbo engine was more fuel-efficient than the carb-fed unit, although economy was still in V12 Jaguar territory at 15mpg. The car was duly released on to the American market in 1989, and from here the Bentley brand didn't look back.

June 1988 saw the Turbo R receiving the new front-end style applied to the rest of the Bentley range, with four circular lamps replacing the original rectangular units, while in 1989 (for the 1990 model year) an adaptive damping system was added, firming up the dampers according to how hard its sensors judged the car was being driven. In 1990, the three-speed GM gearbox was replaced by the more modern 4L80E four-speed version, while for the 1994 model year the ultimate turbocharged SZ Bentley was released: the Turbo S, boasting a 408bhp development of the V8 that produced a colossal 590lb.ft torque at 2000rpm, making the car good for 155mph. This limited edition of just 60 cars was largely built to prove the engine destined for the Continental T coupé.

For the 1996 model year, the regular Turbo R was uprated to 385bhp at 4000rpm and 553lb.ft of torque at 2000rpm, courtesy of a water-to-air intercooler ('chargecooler') and Zytek engine management system allowing 'mapped' control of fuelling, ignition and boost. More modern 17-inch wheels were also introduced at this point.

The standard-wheelbase car was discontinued in 1997 and the sole turbocharged model was the long-wheelbase Turbo RL. Later in the year, the Turbo would appear in its swansong iteration: the Turbo RT, effectively combining the Turbo RL body with the Continental T-specification engine rated at 400bhp. The last of the turbocharged SZ models would leave the Crewe factory in December 1997 as the premises were prepared for the launch of the Arnage.

The success of Bentley's new turbocharged line of the 1980s and '90s had taken Rolls-Royce management completely by surprise, with demand building quickly even for the somewhat flawed original. Between 1982 and '85, a total of 520 Mulsanne Turbos were produced, a figure that jumped to 4657 for the Turbo R, followed by 1508 examples of the Turbo RL. Such was the impact of these performance models, by the mid-1980s Bentley-badged cars were outselling Rolls-Royces for the first time since the 1950s. ■

> **"Between 1982 and '85, a total of 520 Mulsanne Turbos were produced, a figure that jumped to 4657 for the Turbo R"**

A PEARL OF A BENTLEY

Although it took him decades to achieve his Bentley-owning dream, Tim Nelson finally became the proud custodian of this superb late-model Turbo R

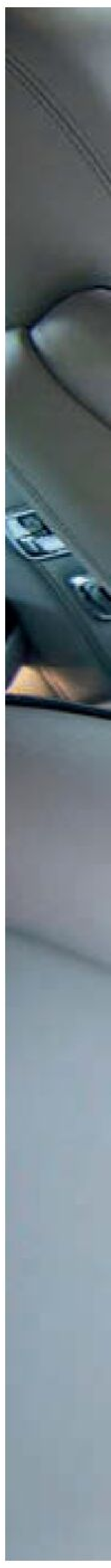
40 TN
HOWE MOTORS Ltd CF82 5QR

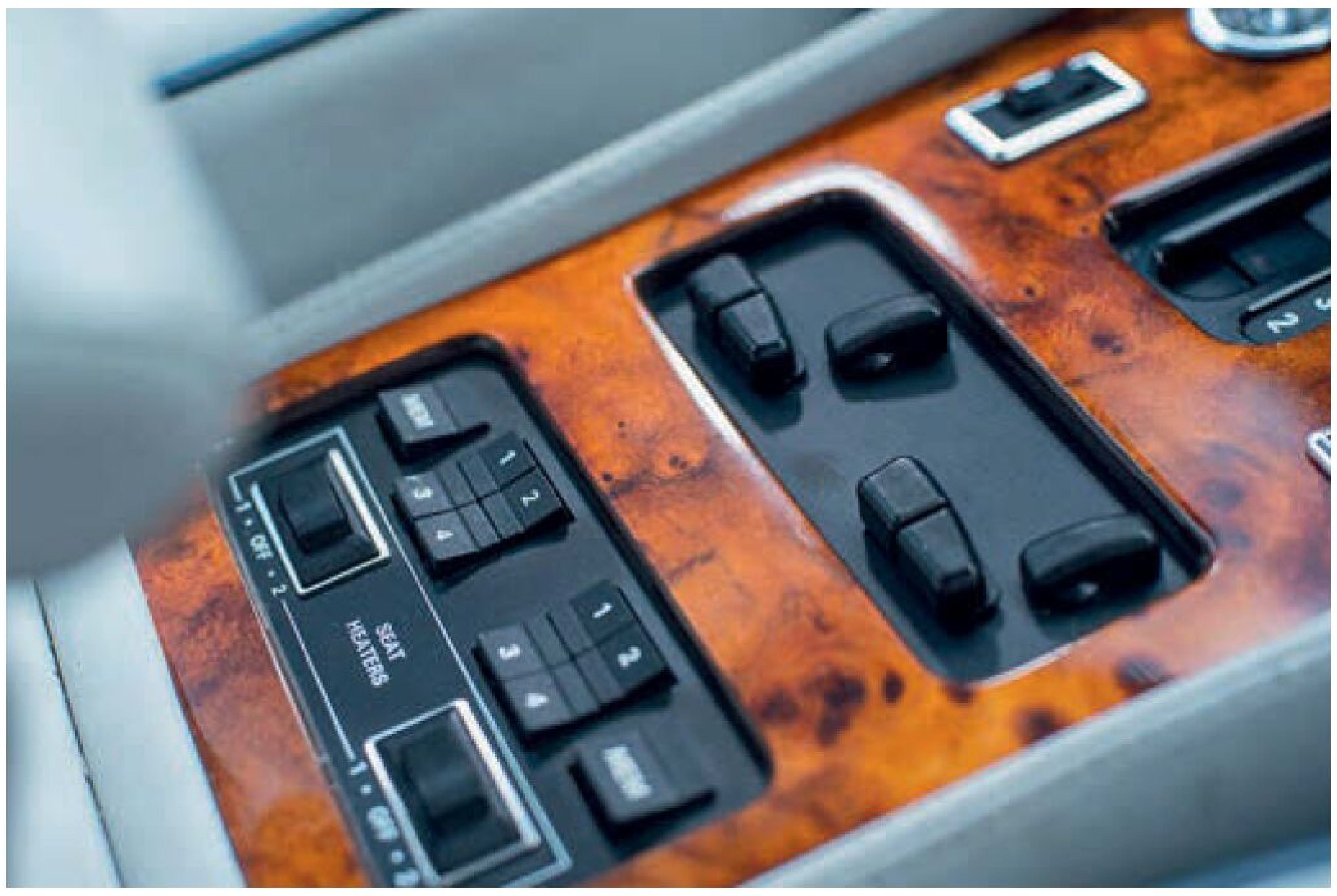
When a car is something special, something with personality and charisma, something that becomes almost one of the family, then it's more than just a machine. And it's tempting to give it – or the 'he' or 'she' it will inevitably have anthropomorphised into – a name. So, allow us to introduce you to Pearl, the 1997 Bentley Turbo R of Tim Nelson. Although he wasn't the one who bestowed the name on her (there's a previous owner to thank for that), as far as Tim's concerned it's a name that's sticking… not least because it's now engraved on the treadplates of each door.

Tim acquired Pearl in July 2018, but his affection for Bentleys stretches back much further than that. His love of cars in general comes from his father, John, but he can identify the moment he fell for the Crewe marque. "I particularly remember a school trip, where we went to watch cricket at Edgbaston," he recalls. "I spent more time walking around the car park with a friend than watching any of the cricket going on. It would have been 1982 or '83, so in the car park there were things like Silver Shadow IIs. I'd always liked the SY models, but there were also some SZs, which were very new at the time. And it was just one of those things; you just kind of think 'Oh God, one day, I'd love one of those'. That kind of stuck. There was something about the boxy design that just appealed to me – a total contrast to what else was around them."

The resurgence of Bentley in the 1980s and '90s, after decades of languishing in Rolls-Royce's shadow, meant that Tim fell firmly under the spell of the Flying B rather than the Spirit of Ecstasy. "I always preferred the look of the Bentley's twin headlamps rather than Rolls-Royce's rectangular lights, although I do flip-flop sometimes," he admits. "Bentley also seemed to be pushing »

While the handling dynamics may not be up to modern standards, the Turbo R still offers a great deal of performance.




SEAT HEATERS

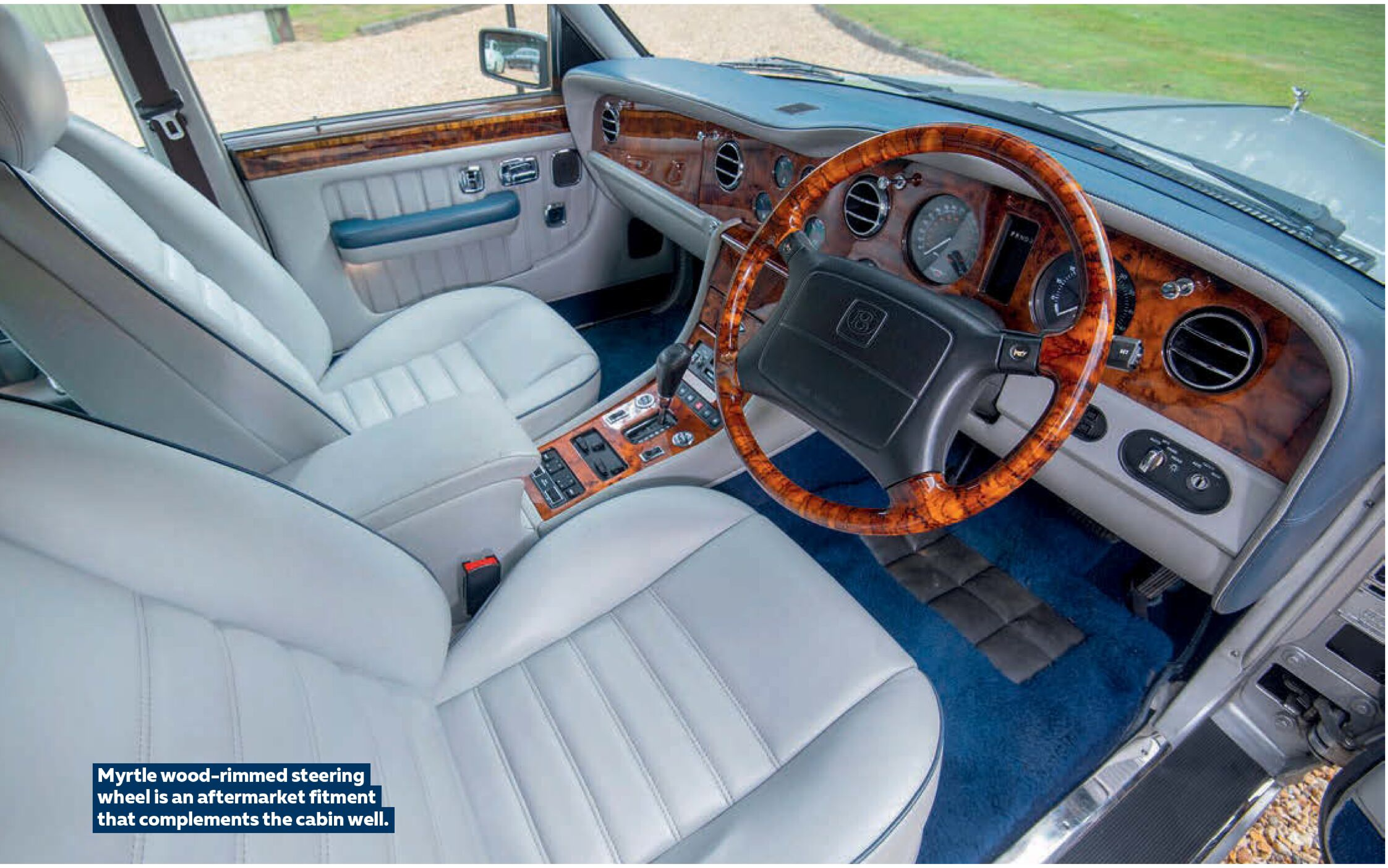
A previous owner gave Pearl her identity, and had each door treadplate engraved with the name.

> **“Tim ended up staying overnight nearby, so he could go back for a second look the following day… and that sealed the deal”**

really hard with its special versions around the mid-1990s, making them as sporty as possible.”

Fast forward to 2018 and Tim, by then a 40-something IT consultant, had moved from London to Manchester, and to a house with more space. It meant that he could start to think more seriously about finally fulfilling his childhood ambition, although there was one big obstacle: “I didn’t know where I could take it for maintenance, servicing and so on. So, I was just randomly driving one day, a few miles from home but in an area I’d never been to before, when I went past Bowling-Ryan, the independent Rolls-Royce and Bentley specialist. And I thought, ‘Right, I’ve got absolutely no reason now not to get one’.”

Thus the serious search for a turbocharged Bentley began. The first car Tim went to look at was a local one, which was “not bad, but it looked a little neglected”. The second was the car he eventually bought, in July 2018. It was in South Wales, so involved a bit of a trek from Manchester to the non-specialist dealer advertising it. Some fall in love with their cars at first sight, but that wasn’t quite the case with Tim and Pearl: “I wasn’t initially too excited by the exterior colour and wasn’t really looking for a long-wheelbase car. And I wasn’t really that sure about it on the test drive. Like most tests, it wasn’t long enough; I wasn’t used to the car, I’d never driven any Rolls-Royce or Bentley before that time, so didn’t really know how it was supposed to feel and I just didn’t know if it felt good enough. But it was in great condition, to my eye at least.” Tim ended up staying overnight nearby, so he could »



Myrtle wood-rimmed steering wheel is an aftermarket fitment that complements the cabin well.

“I’ve had a few fluid leaks of various types… but the more people you talk to, the more you hear that they all do that”

go back for a second look the following day… and that sealed the deal. Love at second sight then? “It was one of those things; actually, I really do want this.”

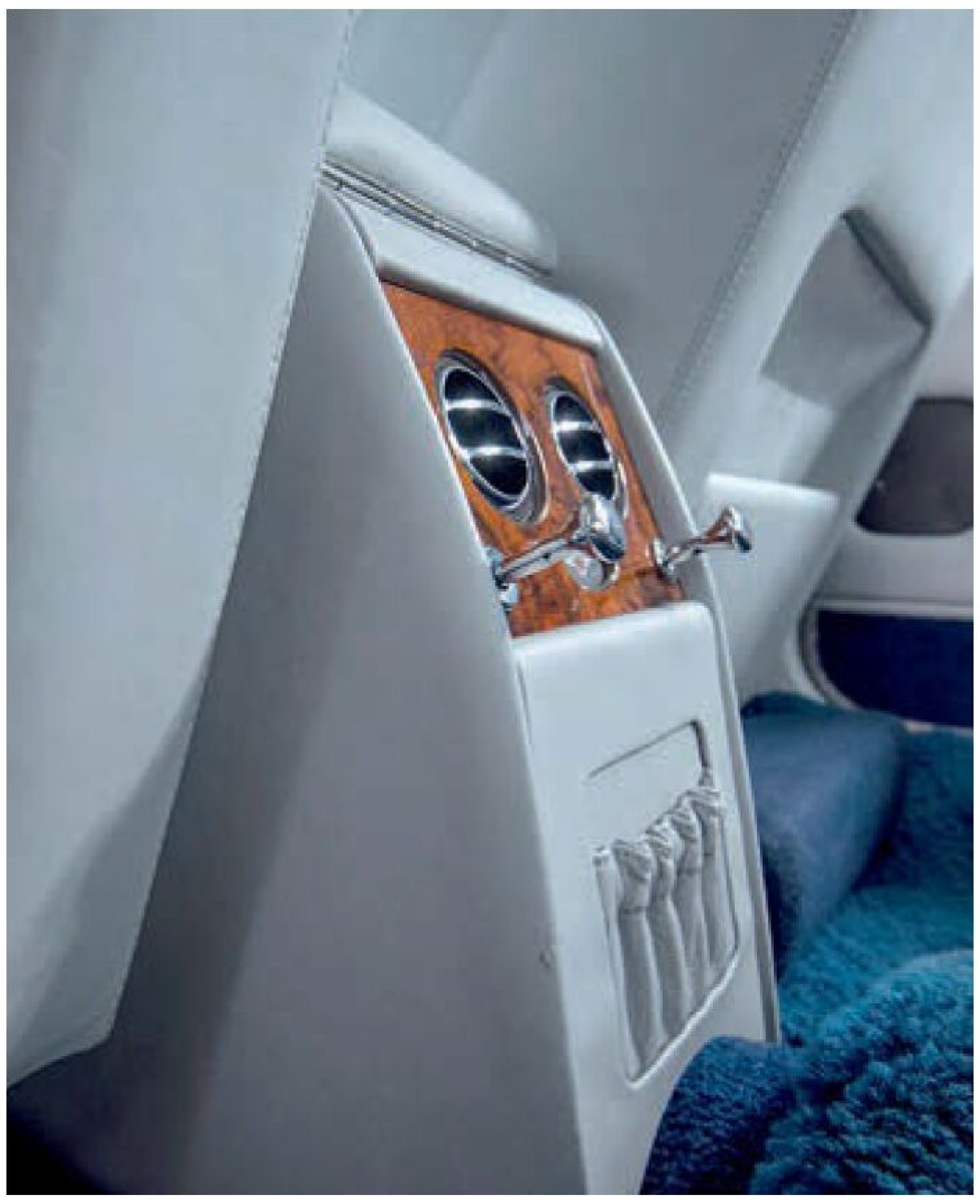
CONFIDENCE BOOST

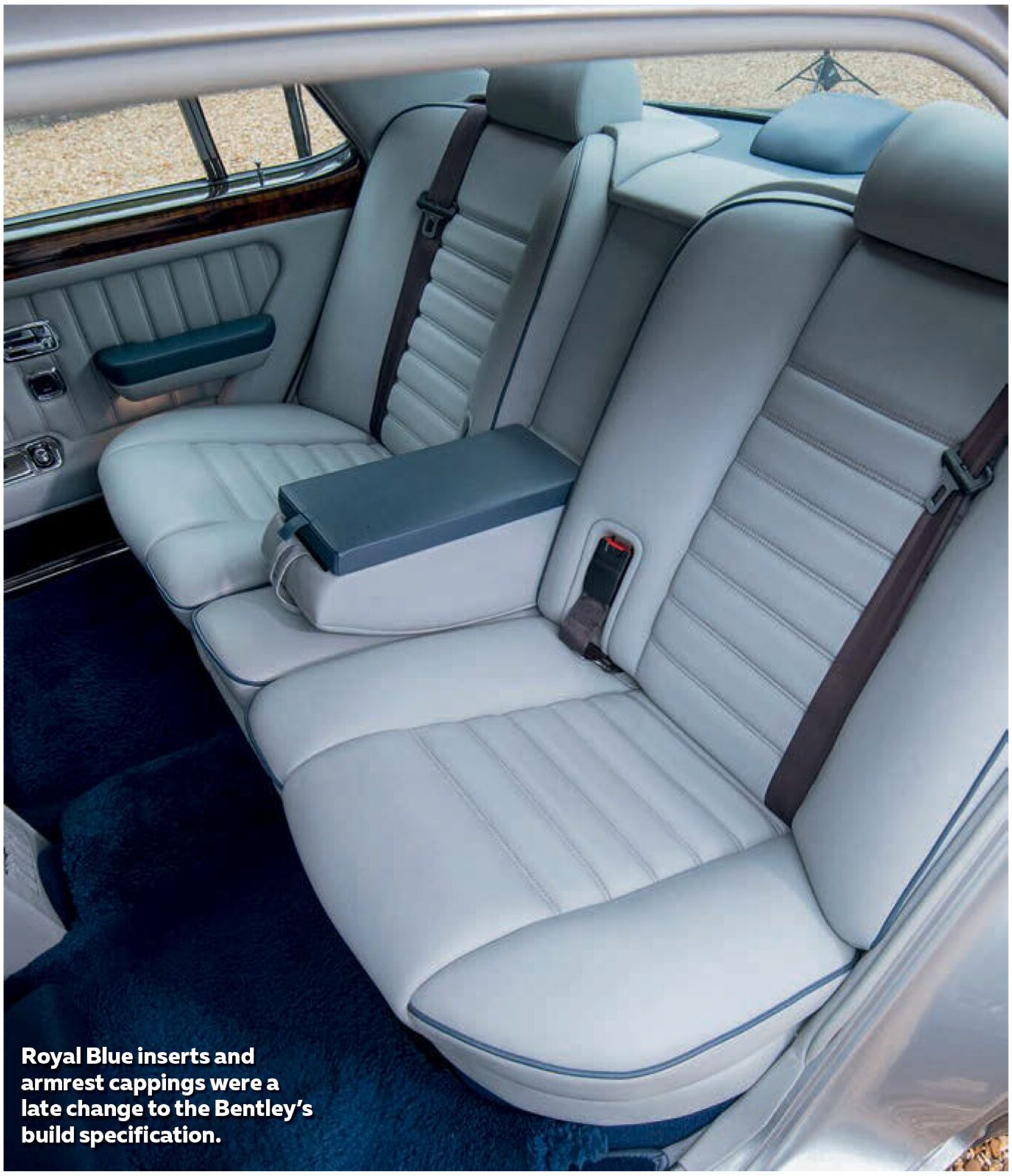
Browsing through the history at the dealer, Tim found it had been looked after by Bowling-Ryan, his local specialist, as well as Paul Yorke at Everything Rolls-Royce in South Wales. “That gave me a level of confidence,” he says. He arranged for Paul to come and check it over for him. It needed a service, all fluids changed, and some minor jobs such as wiper adjustment and the air conditioning re-gassing, plus two new tyres. But that aside, it was all pretty good, having covered fewer than 60,000 miles from new; some years, it had only done a handful of miles between MoTs. “For the asking price, I negotiated with the seller to have Paul Yorke do the required work and, within a couple of weeks, I was heading down to South Wales on the train to pick the car up,” remembers Tim. “On the way home, I stopped outside the Crewe factory on a quiet, sunny evening to take some photographs of the car coming ‘home’.”

That Crewe pilgrimage suggests that Tim appreciated he had something more than a mere machine right from the start. But it would have been difficult not to, just as the previous owner who named her Pearl must have done. Finished in Silver Pearl Metallic (which is presumably why the Bentley is so named), the car emerged from Crewe on May 14th, 1997, around six weeks before the final Turbo R was produced. It was originally specified with Silverstone leather and Black carpets, with Slate piping and binding. But this was later changed to special order Light Grey hide with Royal Blue carpets, binding and piping. “Fortunately, I like grey leather,” says Tim. “I don’t know if it was the guy who ordered it originally or H.R. Owen changing the spec itself, but it also has blue cappings on the armrests. They look so nice and make it a little more distinctive. On the order form, they were going to be black, which might have been a bit heavy, so this was crossed out and ‘Royal Blue’ written in instead.” This small alteration added an extra £335 to the £143,267 purchase price in 1997. Tim can remember buying a small flat in London for a similar price around the same time…

The standard specification of these late Turbo Rs was impressive. They came fitted with automatic headlamp activation, electronic traction assistance (ETAS), upgraded 340mm performance

Tim Nelson, realising his boyhood dream at the wheel of his very own Bentley Turbo R.





Royal Blue inserts and armrest cappings were a late change to the Bentley's build specification.

front brake discs, revised 17-inch alloy wheels and a longer wheelbase – giving an extra four inches of legroom in the rear. This was in addition to the recently adopted viscous control differential and styling update adopted for 1996. Elsewhere, the cars featured automatic ride control, transmission shift-energy management (SEM) and adaptive shift control that would 'learn' the driving style and modify itself accordingly. Then there were the interior creature comforts to pamper passengers, such as the power/tilt-adjustable steering wheel with entry and exit feature, memory facility for the seats, rear-view mirror and steering wheel position, bi-level lumbar support for the heated front seats, and air conditioning outlets for passengers in the rear.

One feature that Tim became quite fond of, more for period novelty than anything else, is the 1990s Motorola »

GSM phone system, with a single handset that can be plugged into the front or rear armrests. Theoretically, being digital, it should still work with an appropriate old SIM card inserted. "Maybe I should try and get hold of one and see if it actually does, assuming they're even available any more," laughs Tim. There's also a six-CD autochanger under the front centre armrest, originally mated with the factory-fitted Alpine radio/cassette player. But that's now been replaced by a modern Sony digital/Bluetooth unit. "It does look out of character with the rest of the car," Tim admits, "but it can be concealed by the wooden panel and I appreciate its up-to-date practicality." Speaking of wood, and rather more in-keeping with the cabin, there's the Myrtle steering wheel, with its burr walnut nicely matching the rest of the car's veneer. A previous owner also added a non-standard fixed Flying B grille mascot as well as a central bonnet strip, both of which suit the silver car rather well.

A GENUINE PEARL

Then, of course, there are those monogrammed treadplates: "I do refer to the car as a she, as Pearl," says Tim. "It's an inherited name, from a couple of owners back I believe. All the chrome strips in the doorways have been so engraved. He also spent around £1500 on having her professionally detailed. Whatever coating they put on is still pretty good, because the car is very easy to rinse down. His money was well-spent."

At the time of our photo shoot for *Rolls-Royce & Bentley Driver* magazine, there had been very few problems with Pearl under Tim's ownership. Fortunately, the Bentley had its head gaskets – the Achilles' heel of these Turbo Rs – replaced before his

Flying B mascot and bonnet strip were additions by a previous owner, but blend in nicely with the metallic silver car.

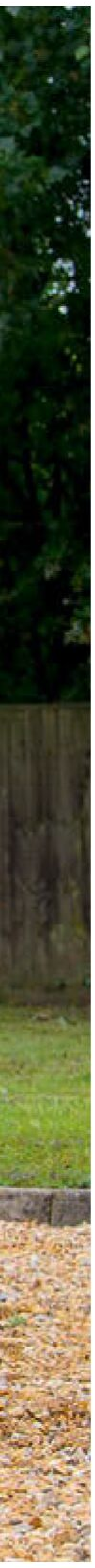
TURBO R
40 TN

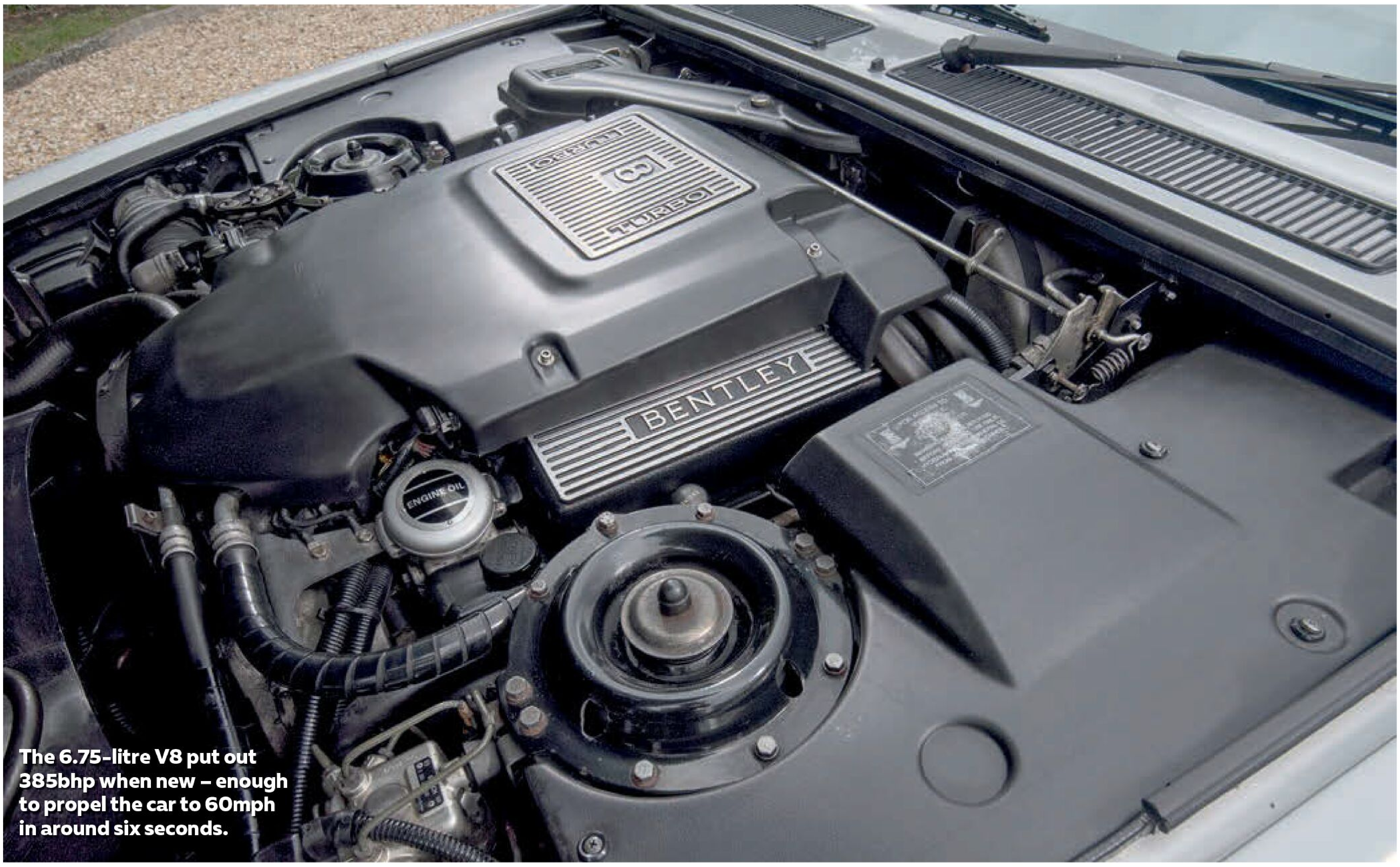
“I don’t often measure the miles per gallon, thinking of it more in terms of smiles per mile”

acquisition. John Bowling at Bowling-Ryan was looking after the car on a routine basis and, aside from some electrical issues, she’d been behaving herself. “I’ve had a few fluid leaks of various types, but the more people you talk to, the more you hear that they all do that,” smiles Tim. “It’s when they’re not doing it that you need to worry, because it means they’re empty!”

Tim told us that he believes in using Pearl on a regular basis, including for trips away: “When we went to Skye, the car was apparently the talk of the island. It was noted that we were there – hopefully in a good way. Skye has some lovely roads that really suit something like the Bentley; gradual, lengthy corners rather than twisty sections. I’ve done the North Coast 500 in my modern Mercedes in a clockwise direction, so I’d like to take the Bentley up there and do it anti-clockwise. There’s a really picturesque castle in Dunrobin that the Bentley would look stunning parked outside of.”

So, has the dream of the boy at the cricket ground, all those years ago, been fulfilled? “Oh yes, he’s certainly got what he wanted. I don’t often measure the miles per gallon, thinking of it more in terms of smiles per mile.” ■





The 6.75-litre V8 put out 385bhp when new – enough to propel the car to 60mph in around six seconds.

COMPLETE REINVENTION

Replacing the SZ generation in 1998 was the all-new Arnage, a car that went on to enjoy a decade-long career thanks to ongoing development by Bentley's new custodian

A decade and a half ago, Bentley Motors announced that its long-running Arnage – the SZ-replacing model launched whilst the company was still under Vickers control – was about to bid adieu, its demise being marked by the arrival of a Final Edition in strictly limited numbers. It marked the end of an era, being the last Bentley launched prior to the marque being sold into German ownership and ultimately split from Rolls-Royce – and for many Winged B aficionados, it therefore has a special place in automotive history.

Vickers, the British aviation, defence, marine and engineering conglomerate, had acquired Rolls-Royce Motors in 1980, which meant it was also the custodian of Bentley. The marque was struggling, however, with the Bentley T2 and subsequent SZ-generation Mulsanne achieving only a tiny number of sales compared with their vastly more successful Silver Shadow II and Silver Spirit siblings. Vickers saw potential, however, and it was during the 1980s that Bentley re-emerged as a dominant force in the ultra-luxury market, with the adoption of turbocharging and the launch of the Turbo R propelling it to new heights. Back in 1980, Bentley accounted for just a tiny proportion of Crewe's production, but by 1986 this had risen to 40 per cent – and five years later it was a 50/50 split between Rolls-Royce and Bentley, with the latter's share still climbing.

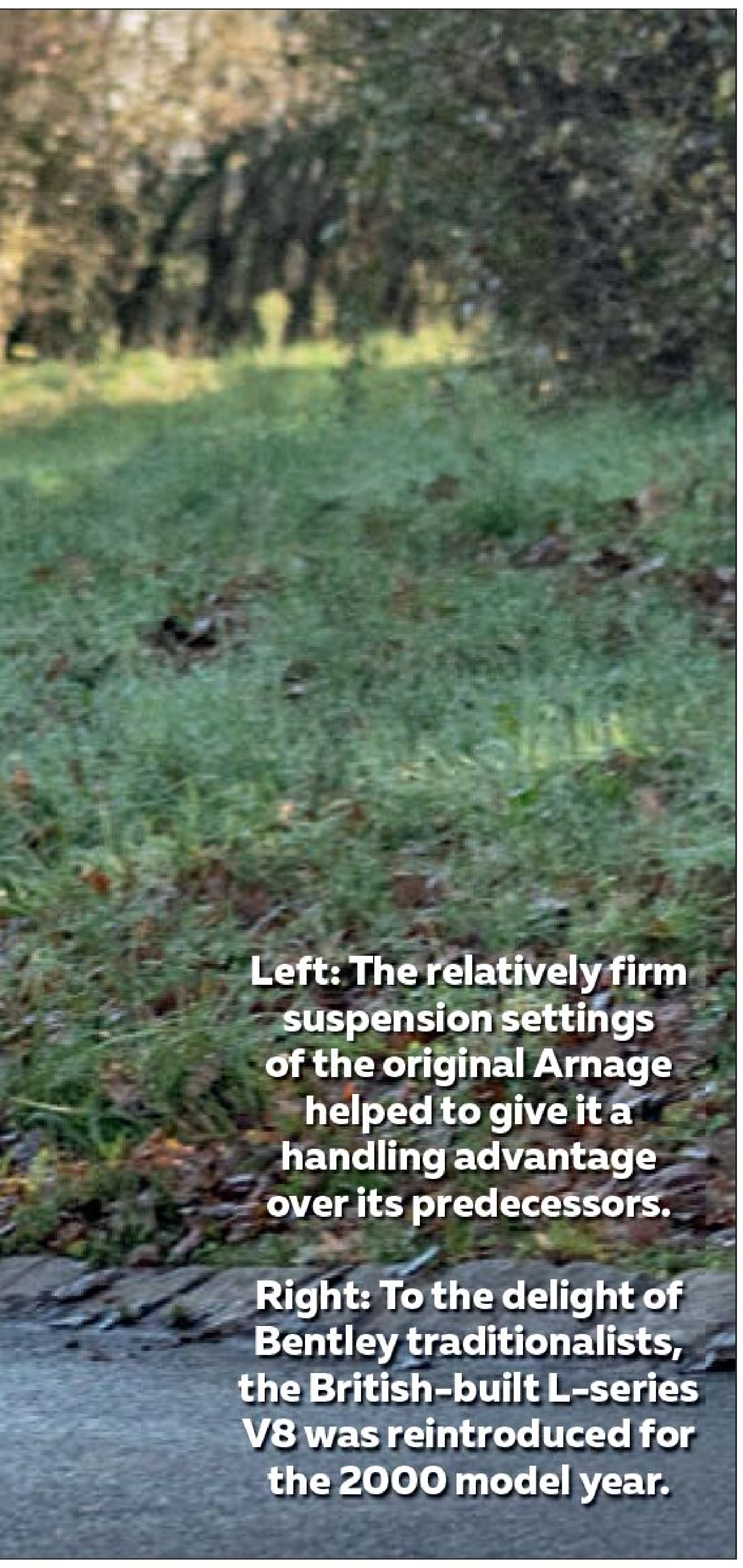
Initial work on successors to the Silver Spirit and its various Bentley derivatives began in the late '80s, with design officially commencing in October 1990 under engineering director Mike Dunne, chief designer Graham Hull, and Steve Harper. Management was happy enough with the way things were going to 'freeze' »

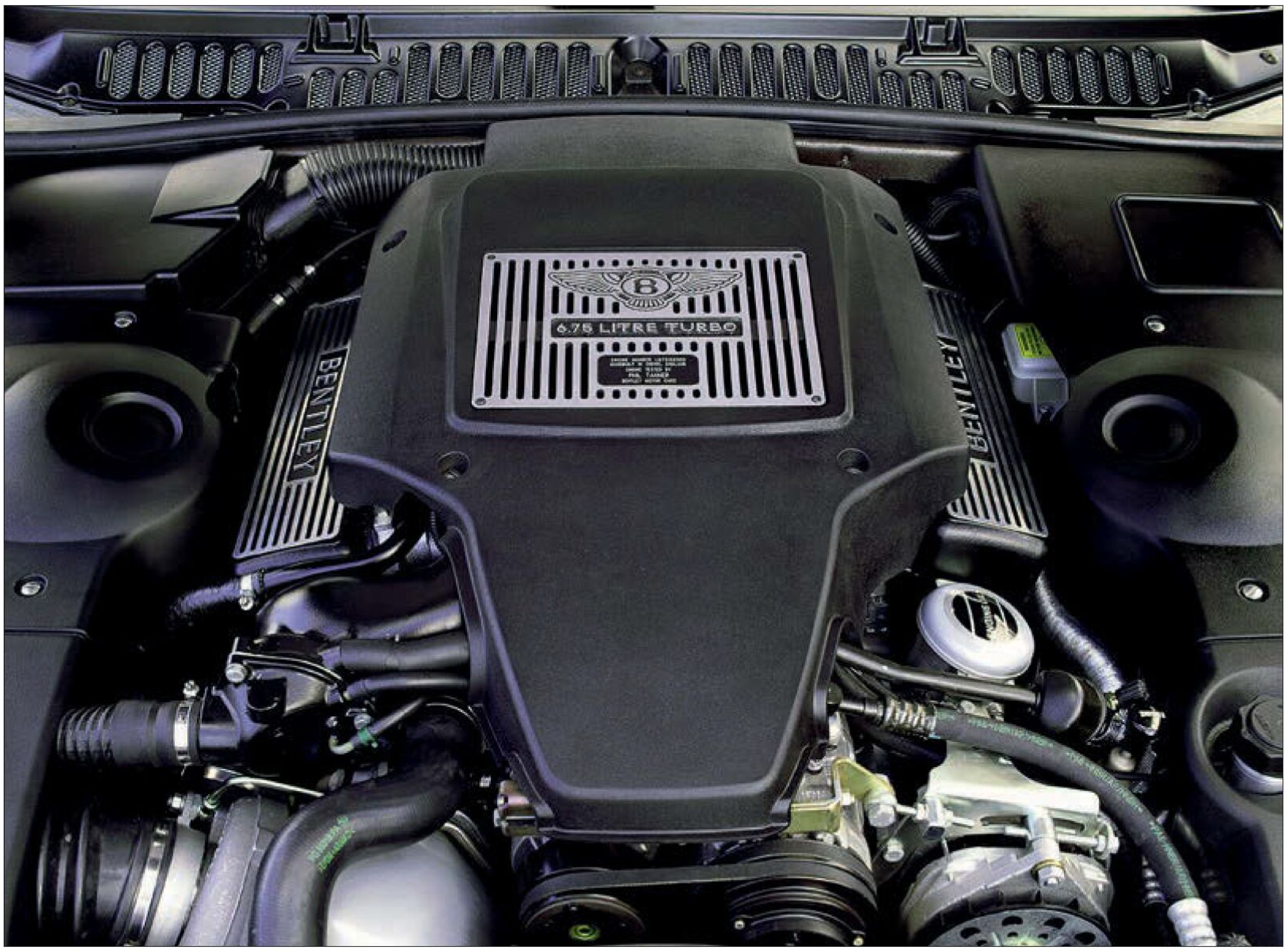
the conceptual design in June 1991. However, after Dunne retired in '92, his role as project director passed to Tony Gott, a former TI and Lotus engineer. He took over in January 1994, and it was under him that several refinements were made before the definitive design was reached later that year. Design patents were eventually taken out for the Rolls-Royce Silver Seraph and Bentley Arnage in July 1995, based on prototype machines.

While the angular Silver Spirit's styling had clearly been an evolution of the previous Silver Shadow, the Silver Seraph was much more of a clean-sheet effort, with its body adopting some pleasing curves. Hull admitted to being influenced by both the Silver Cloud and yacht styling for his creation. Aside from the radiator grille, badges and wheels, the Arnage was externally identical to its Rolls-Royce sister. And on both cars, more complex electronics were incorporated as standard, including adaptive ride control, anti-lock brakes and digital engine management.

It was the actual engines themselves, however, that proved to be the real talking point. By the 1990s, it was felt that the trusty 6750cc L-series V8 was a little long in the tooth, having been the mainstay of all Rolls-Royces and Bentleys since 1959. There was a desire to come up with something a little fresher. However, Vickers at the time was going through one of its more turbulent financial periods, and there simply wasn't the money to develop a new body and a new engine. The way forward had been signalled by the appearance of a concept Bentley – the Java – at the 1994 Geneva Motor Show, which used a BMW 5 Series platform. This partly prompted Vickers to take the controversial decision to buy in engines from another manufacturer. And in another break from the past,

The Crewe plant was updated to prepare for Arnage production, with £40 million invested in a new body shop occupying the old engine assembly area.





Left: The relatively firm suspension settings of the original Arnage helped to give it a handling advantage over its predecessors.

Right: To the delight of Bentley traditionalists, the British-built L-series V8 was reintroduced for the 2000 model year.

it would be making its own bodies rather than having them constructed by Pressed Steel, as previously.

ENGINE OPTIONS

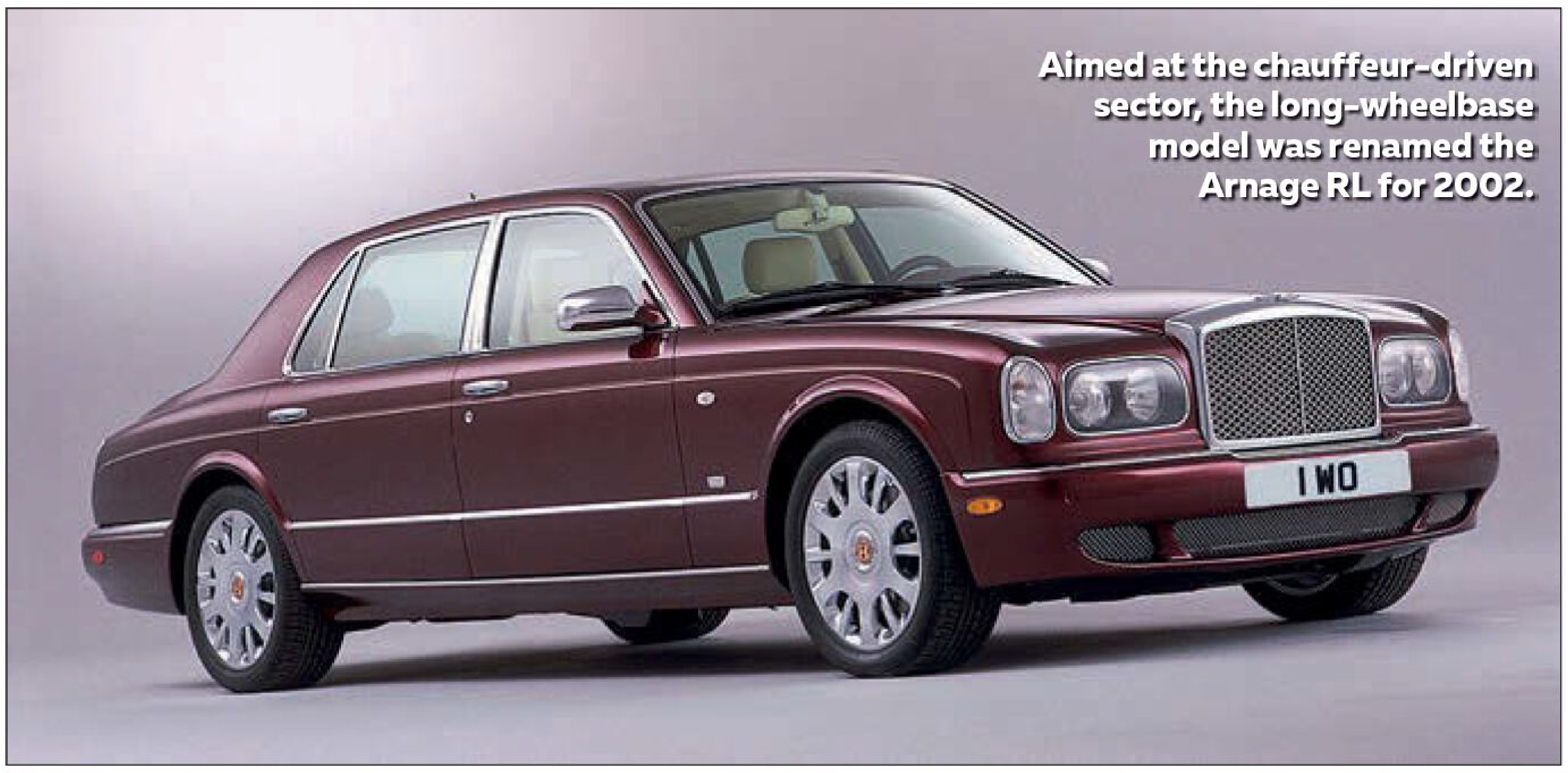
Responsible for pressing the body panels was the Vickers factory in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, as well as engineering contract group Mayflower's Coventry-based plant. Rolls-Royce invested £40 million in a new body shop occupying the old engine assembly area at Crewe. Production of the V8 engines for the outgoing models shifted to Cosworth Engineering in Wellingborough, which Vickers had acquired in 1990.

But which engine supplier should Rolls-Royce go with, bearing in mind its constant need to win back the title of Best Car in the World? A Ford V12 and General Motors' Northstar V8 were both considered… but rejected. Ultimately, the choice came down to BMW or Mercedes-Benz, with the latter appearing the best choice for having V8 and V12 engines that were arguably better than their BMW equivalents. However, because BMW had previous connections with Vickers, including the Bentley Java concept, it was Munich that triumphed over Stuttgart. The decision to team up with BMW was taken in December 1994. The German marque also offered to buy a 20 per cent stake in Rolls-Royce, but this was rejected.

For the Rolls-Royce Silver Seraph, the M73 5379cc V12 was chosen, a unit also used in the E38-generation BMW 750. For the Bentley Arnage, however, it was the 4398cc M62 V8, with both engines being mated to five-speed automatic transmissions.

By late 1997, development work on the new Silver Seraph and Arnage was over and pilot production cars began to appear from early '98, with »

> "Chief designer Graham Hull admitted to being influenced by both the Silver Cloud and yacht styling for his latest creation"



Aimed at the chauffeur-driven sector, the long-wheelbase model was renamed the Arnage RL for 2002.

both models making their debut at that year's Geneva Salon. Perhaps inevitably, there was some discontent among traditionalists that two such resolutely British marques should now be powered by German engines, even though the V8 and V12 units offered certain improvements over the old design. While both cars were very similar inside and out, the Bentley had a centre gear selector and more comprehensive instrumentation laid out in a slightly different style, while the Rolls-Royce had a column-mounted selector and fewer dials.

The Arnage and Silver Seraph weren't the only things for sale that year, as Rolls-Royce and Bentley were also up for grabs, with Vickers having confirmed in October 1997 that it intended to divest itself of its car division to focus more on its core businesses. BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Volkswagen, Ford and Ferrari were all cited as interested parties, but eventually BMW emerged as the frontrunner. In April 1998, Vickers reached a formal agreement with BMW to sell Rolls-Royce to it for £340 million. However, VW nipped in with a £430 million offer at the last moment, which Vickers' shareholders voted to accept in the July.

> "Volkswagen later claimed that it had only ever wanted Bentley, which by then was the dominant marque anyway"

While the Seraph and Arnage were similar inside, the Bentley had a centre gear selector and more comprehensive instrumentation.

Early examples of the Arnage were criticised for their lack of rear legroom and rather tight headroom.

What Volkswagen got for its money was Bentley, the Crewe factory, and the rights to the Spirit of Ecstasy mascot and Rolls-Royce radiator shape. It didn't, however, have the rights to the Rolls-Royce name, which was still controlled by the separate Rolls-Royce PLC aero engine company. Volkswagen later claimed that it had only wanted Bentley anyway, which by then was the dominant marque. But the impression was that the company had slipped up, especially when BMW asked the PLC if it could use the Rolls-Royce name on cars, and was handed the rights for just £40 million.

A major headache for Volkswagen was that the Arnage used a BMW engine – which BMW had threatened to stop supplying while the two were at loggerheads over ownership of Rolls-Royce and Bentley. Eventually, the two German giants did sort out their issues, but having to use such major components from BMW still didn't sit well with VW, and it decided to re-engineer the Arnage to accept the old Rolls-Royce L-series V8 after all. The official line was that customers just weren't keen on a BMW engine in a Bentley, despite sales of the German-powered cars being perfectly respectable.

To differentiate between the two versions, 2000-model-year cars with BMW engines were rebadged as Arnage Green Labels, while those with the newly reintroduced traditional British V8s (which were effectively the same single turbocharger units as used in the Turbo R) were dubbed Arnage Red Labels. Their debut came in October 1999, with both variants receiving a stiffer bodyshell and larger wheels and brakes, plus an Alpine pop-up navigation system, parking sensors, modified seats to improve their rear legroom, folding electric door mirrors, a modified steering rack and plastic headlamp covers in place of glass.

FURTHER UPDATES

The final 52 BMW-powered Arnages were constructed during 2000 as Arnage Birkins, referencing one of the most prominent Bentley Boys of the 1920s and '30s, Tim Birkin. One of the differences was that, instead of five gauges in the centre of the dash, there were just three. These cars were sold into 2001, after which the BMW-powered Bentley was no more. The Red Label tag was now no longer needed for differentiation and was dropped in 2002, shortly after a long-wheelbase model – with an extra 250mm of length in its middle – had been unveiled.

Alongside that was the normal-sized Arnage Le Mans Series, commemorating Bentley's return to the Le Mans 24-hour race after 71 years. Just 153 of these appeared, with distinctive features such as quad exhaust pipes, front wing vents, five-spoke alloy wheels with red calipers visible through them, wider wheelarches, remodelled bumpers, Dark Racing Green instruments with Le Mans lettering, drilled pedals, darker burr walnut veneer, and chrome and leather-clad gear levers. The exterior colours were Silver Storm, Black Oriole and Le Mans Racing Green.

Replacing the Red Label, meanwhile, were the Series Two Arnage R and Arnage T. Bentley claimed that the Series Two had been completely re-engineered, which was overstating things somewhat, but more stiffening was added and there were suspension upgrades as well. Under the bonnet, two smaller Garratt T3 turbochargers replaced the previous single T3 item. What wasn't mentioned in the Series 2 publicity was that the engine was also slightly modified to try and reduce the number of head gasket failures that had been besmirching the »

ENGINE CHOICE

Compared to the old Rolls-Royce L-series, BMW's M62 all-aluminium double overhead-cam V8 was (technically) an improvement, having been designed in the 1990s rather than the 1950s. When Rolls-Royce engineers assessed it, however, they were concerned about its pulling power at lower speeds; but fortunately for Vickers, having engine specialist Cosworth in its armoury paid dividends.

Cosworth was able to take power for the 4398cc unit from 282bhp to 349bhp by dint of adding two Garratt turbochargers and many other modifications, even if torque stayed roughly the same at around 310lb.ft, and in such form the M62 was far more appropriate for a big Bentley bruiser.

The 4.4-litre BMW V8 went on to find other British homes beyond Bentley, as derivations of the same unit were also used in the Morgan Aero 8 from 2000 and the Range Rover from 2002, albeit without the benefits of turbocharging.

The steadily-updated Arnage remained in production at the historic Crewe plant for more than a decade.

Bentley image. Visually, new bumpers, tailpipes and side sills (plus a reduction in chrome) made the cars stand out from their predecessors. Inside, the seats were made more comfortable.

The R was the more laid-back of the Bentley bunch with 'just' 399bhp, the T being further tweaked to an impressive 450bhp to offer a top speed of 170mph and a 0-60mph time of just 5.5 seconds. At this point, the LWB model became the RL. Another very exclusive model of 2002 was the Bentley State Limousine, which was developed from the Arnage for the Queen's Golden Jubilee; just two were built, and they remain in use for state duties today.

Bentley's win at the 2003 Le Mans 24-hours led to a very limited run of 40 special cars created by Mulliner. These T24 Bentleys shared similar features to the earlier Le Mans models, but also had Union Flag badges, 19-inch split-rim polished alloy wheels, and carbonfibre in place of the usual wood.

SPECIAL EDITIONS

In 2005 came a further facelift, with different headlamps and bonnet line, new wheels, enhanced suspension and new switchgear – the latter doing away with anything from the BMW parts bin in favour of Volkswagen controls instead. A drophead coupé was shown off at the 2005 Los Angeles Auto Show but wouldn't make it to production until 2007.

Just 40 examples of the Arnage T24 were built to celebrate Bentley's win at the 2003 Le Mans 24-hours.

More limited editions followed, including 2005's Arnage Blue Train to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Wolf Barnato's famous race against the French Blue Train Express between Cannes and Calais. The 36 models were based on the Arnage R, but with the T's 450bhp engine. Among the features were a dash-mounted plaque that had a silhouette of the Gurney Nutting coupé that was believed to have been Barnato's car. It was only some years later that it was discovered that a Mulliner-bodied saloon had been used instead.

Bentley's 60 years of production at Crewe was marked by the Arnage Diamond Series, with 60 cars planned – although it seems the company fell one short. Diamond-quartered wood, diamond-quilted leather, a mesh front grille, stainless steel bumpers and 19-inch alloy wheels were standard fitment. But what enthusiasts probably appreciated most was the reappearance of a Winged B mascot topping off the radiator surround – the first time one had been used on a series production Bentley since the 1970s.

In 2007, there was another update, albeit with most of the changes under the skin. The Arnage T saw power rise to 500bhp, which made 179mph possible, while the Arnage R's output rose to 450bhp. It was the fitment of new Mitsubishi low-inertia turbochargers that helped make these surges in power possible; they spooled up to maximum speed in half the time of the previous Garratt units, although a reprofiled camshaft and revamped electronics also played their role. Remarkably, the 2007 version of the 6750cc V8 had around 300bhp more than its 1959 incarnation, yet only 60 per cent of its fuel consumption.

Unlike previous models, bodyshells for the Arnage (and Silver Seraph) were produced in-house at Crewe.

END OF AN ERA

Bentley announced in September 2008 that it would cease building the Arnage the following year, by which time it would have outlived Rolls-Royce's Silver Seraph by seven years. The last 96 cars were dubbed the Final Series models and were really quite special, featuring the Arnage T's more powerful engine (now with power increased from 450 to 500bhp) in conjunction with the R's softer, more comfortable suspension. Polished-alloy five-spoke 20-inch wheels were fitted, the headlamp and rear light bezels were body-coloured, the radiator and bumper grilles were dark mesh, and there were Le Mans-style wing vents and a billet aluminium 'jewel' fuel filler cap.

> “Bentley announced in September 2008 that it would cease building the Arnage the following year, by which time it would have outlived the Silver Seraph by seven years”

Customers had a wide choice of standard colours (42 in all, plus 25 different interior hides and three wood veneers), although Bentley ‘suggested’ the combinations of Titan Grey with Anthracite interior, Royal Ebony with Beluga, Windsor Blue with Windsor Blue, Meteor with Imperial Blue, Burnt Oak with Burnt Oak, or Black Velvet with Burgundy.

The Mulliner-designed interior featured Final Series sill plates, drilled alloy pedals, distinctive chrome trim and a rear cocktail cabinet (complete with Final Series-branded stainless steel flask and shot glasses) complemented by a pair of picnic tables. For even more in-car entertainment, meanwhile, there was a 1100-watt Naim sound system with ten speakers and a dual-channel sub-woofer – at that time the most powerful production set-up ever fitted in a car.

Once the very last Final Series had been built, the Arnage story drew to a close, its replacement being an all-new-generation Mulsanne, marking the revival of a name from the days when both Bentley and Rolls-Royce were still married. It was a pivotal moment for Bentley, for it represented the first time in many decades that there would be no commonality between a four-door Winged B model and its Rolls-Royce alternative. ■

The end of Arnage production was marked via the lavishly equipped, ultra-exclusive Final Series.

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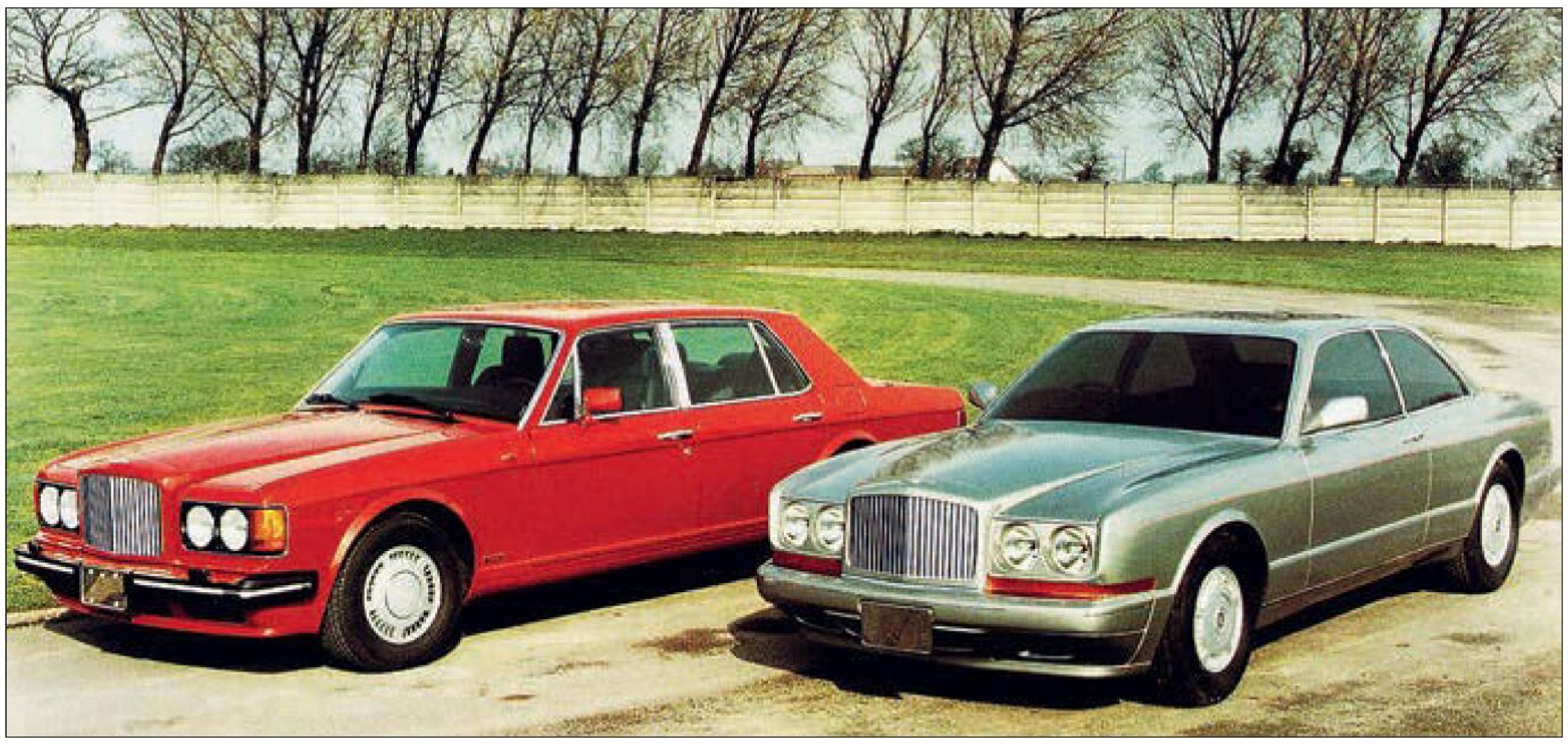
FITTING FLAGSHIP

Finally starting to achieve its sales potential, Bentley deviated from badge-engineering with the bespoke new Continental R, giving the marque a flagship coupé for the 1990s

Press day of the 1991 Geneva motor show saw the Rolls-Royce Motors stand surrounded by journalists and photographers, elbowing each other for the ultimate vantage point. All they'd had was an enigmatic invitation to attend a Rolls-Royce/Bentley press conference… and that was it. Although there had been rumours of a new Bentley, the stand was decked out in the blue and silver of Rolls-Royce, with the linked Rs and Spirit of Ecstasy dominating the walls.

It wasn't until a 40-second video presentation had finished – during which time Bentley logos had replaced the Rolls-Royce graphics – that it started to dawn on the gathered media that this could indeed herald the arrival of a new Bentley, a fact confirmed by presentations from Crewe management. The car remained absent, however, until a Turbo R on display was slowly driven off the stand to be replaced by a Vermillion-hued Continental R, driven by a very nervous Dave Preece

Project 90 – revealed in 1985 – showed how a bespoke Bentley coupé might look.



A full-size glassfibre mock-up of the Continental R alongside the Bentley Turbo R.

The press launch of the Continental R attracted huge crowds at the Geneva Salon.

to the unrestrained accompaniment of Elgar's *Zadok the Priest*, which faded away to allow *Land of Hope and Glory* to boom from the speakers.

For the first time ever, the organisers of the Geneva Salon had allowed a car to be driven on to a stand accompanied by music. It marked a very special moment for all at Crewe. In 20 magical seconds, Bentley had stolen the show and announced that it was – well and truly – out of the shadow of Rolls-Royce.

Coupés had long been a feature of Bentley's heritage, of course, with H.J. Mulliner's R-Type and S-series Continentals being among the most famous… and desirable. From the mid-1960s, however, there was a decline in such extra-special Bentleys, with the marque becoming little more than a badge-engineering exercise.

BENTLEY'S RETURN

It was, of course, the Mulsanne Turbo's launch of 1982 that paved the way for the reinvention of the marque, proving to the world that Crewe's decision-makers finally appreciated what a valuable asset they had in Bentley. Here was a car that, despite its flaws, had the potential to appeal to a new generation of younger entrepreneurs, as well as those marque enthusiasts who still revered the racing Bentleys of more than half a century earlier.

With that realisation came an influx of new, younger management to Pym's Lane, executives who weren't afraid to question the shibboleths of Rolls-Royce and Bentley, how the cars were engineered and built, how the company was run and – if it was to survive – what its customers actually wanted.

Spool back through the history of the British motor industry and 1983 will go on record as its nadir. In the midst of a global recession, Rolls-Royce and Bentley were fading, with conservative management clinging desperately to a 'them and us' philosophy of industrial relations and arcane working methods. Sales slumped from a projected 3400 cars to just 1500, and the workforce went on a crippling strike in the October and November – the first in 23 years, and a year after 1200 colleagues had been made redundant. If you walked into a Rolls-Royce or Bentley showroom, you could even – horror of horrors – get a discount.

It was at this point that Malcolm Hart, Mike Dunn and Peter Ward (who became director of sales and marketing, engineering director and chief executive respectively) walked into Pym's Lane, along with others like John Stephenson, the company's first-ever product planning director. They had all come from different automotive backgrounds: Ward was the former head of Peugeot Talbot's Motaquip spare parts operation, Dunn was a leading light behind Ford's revolutionary-looking Sierra, and Stephenson had been part of BL's product planning department.

Until the early 1980s, Rolls-Royce »

Motors was predominantly engineering-led. Marketing and customers alike were told what they ought to have rather than the clients getting what they wanted, with new-model introductions dictated by engineering timescales rather than a pre-determined sales strategy. But things were about to change.

It was decided that a project team led by John Lake should be established at Mulliner Park Ward to investigate various niche products, with inputs from Ogle design, Jankel, Heffernan and Greenley. And as Bentley started to assert its independence through products like the entry-level Eight, there was a growing realisation that the marque's less formal grille brought great potential, particularly for a two-door coupé – an idea that eventually emerged as Project 90 at the 1985 Geneva Salon.

> “Coupés had long been a feature of Bentley's heritage, with H.J. Mulliner's R-Type and S-series Continentals being among the most famous”

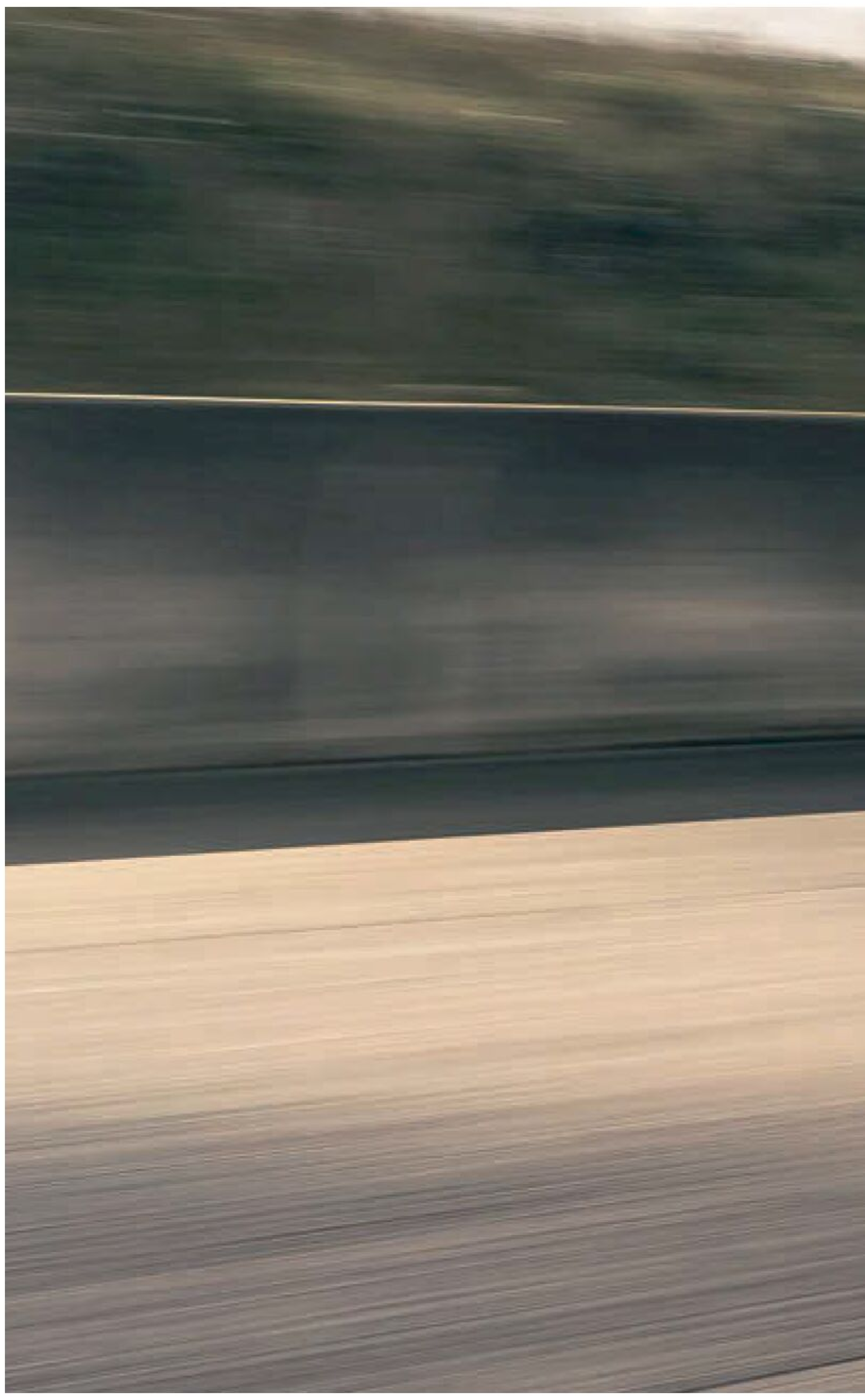
ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Project 90 – or Black Rat as it was quickly dubbed at the factory – was more than just a concept car. By the time it appeared, it had gone through virtually a full engineering programme, including 200 hours of wind tunnel testing with quarter-scale models at Southampton University's facility prior to validation with a full-scale model at MIRA's wind tunnel.

Those early tests predicted a 0.35 Cd figure (not bad for such a bluff-fronted car) as well as revealing some serious shortcomings, including 80 per cent higher rear lift than a Mulsanne Turbo, and a 50 per cent increase in yaw caused by the centre of pressure being significantly further forward. Various rear spoilers were tried but ended up diminishing the car's aesthetics, while concern over wind noise and dirt deposition demanded detailed work around the A-pillars and header rail from the design team.

1800 TU
Bentley Continental R: Nobel-Coupé aus Crewe
BEAUTIFUL BENTLEY...
Continental R
Bentley Continental R
tley Continental R civilised supercar
Newcomer with a touch of class
Bentley unveils the Continental R, the first new model for 40 years
BEST OF BRITISH
sive
,000
percar!
Turbocharged 6.75-litre V8 engine
Swiss
Conti-Fusion abgel
Jetzt auch ohne ABE
rsitziges Bentley-Coupé für 500 000 Mark
WORTH THE WAIT....no shortage of buy
New £160,000 Bentley hailed
1800 TU

Bentley's bespoke new coupé made headlines around the world upon its debut.



Designers tend not to be over-fastidious when it comes to concept cars, as that's exactly what they are: concepts. But to win Crewe's approval, John Stephenson knew that Project 90 had to look real, with a chance of series production based on the contemporary Mulsanne Turbo floorpan and running gear. This was a challenge in itself, as basic engineering requirements like the scuttle height, engine mounting and cooling package couldn't be reconfigured.

Meanwhile, John Heffernan worked closely with Graham Hull and Martin Bourne from the Crewe design department to develop and design the car's lipstick red interior, using modified standard seating and fascia. It was such attention to detail that fooled the press at the '85 Geneva Salon into thinking Project 90 was heading for production. What they didn't appreciate was that it had two different profiles, with one side having a less pronounced 'Coke bottle' effect over the rear haunches.

Back at Crewe, the camp was split in two over Project 90's future. John Stephenson was confident that a limited-edition run of two- and four-door versions was viable. Ward, Heffernan and Greenley, however, were less convinced: "Project 90 was fine for the 1980s but it wasn't a Bentley for the 1990s," Greenley was quoted as saying. And Ward had more pressing matters on his mind, uppermost being a 10-year programme of investment, restructuring the factory and developing new models, as he later explained: "We had to have a solid infrastructure in place before we could even contemplate launching »

One of the images used in the original press pack, issued to journalists in 1991.

Continental R

a top-of-the-range Bentley coupé."

A more efficient component production and ordering process, called Manufacturing Resource Planning, was introduced in 1988 along with an almost continuous stream of model revisions. A new £20 million paint shop was opened and new work practices put in place, with demarcations between skills removed and new labour agreements signed. It was a £200 million gamble – but without it, Ward and his team were convinced that neither brand would have a long-term future.

> **"The original Mulsanne Turbo might have had an impressive turn of speed for such a bulky car, but its dynamics left much to be desired"**

PROJECT NEPAL

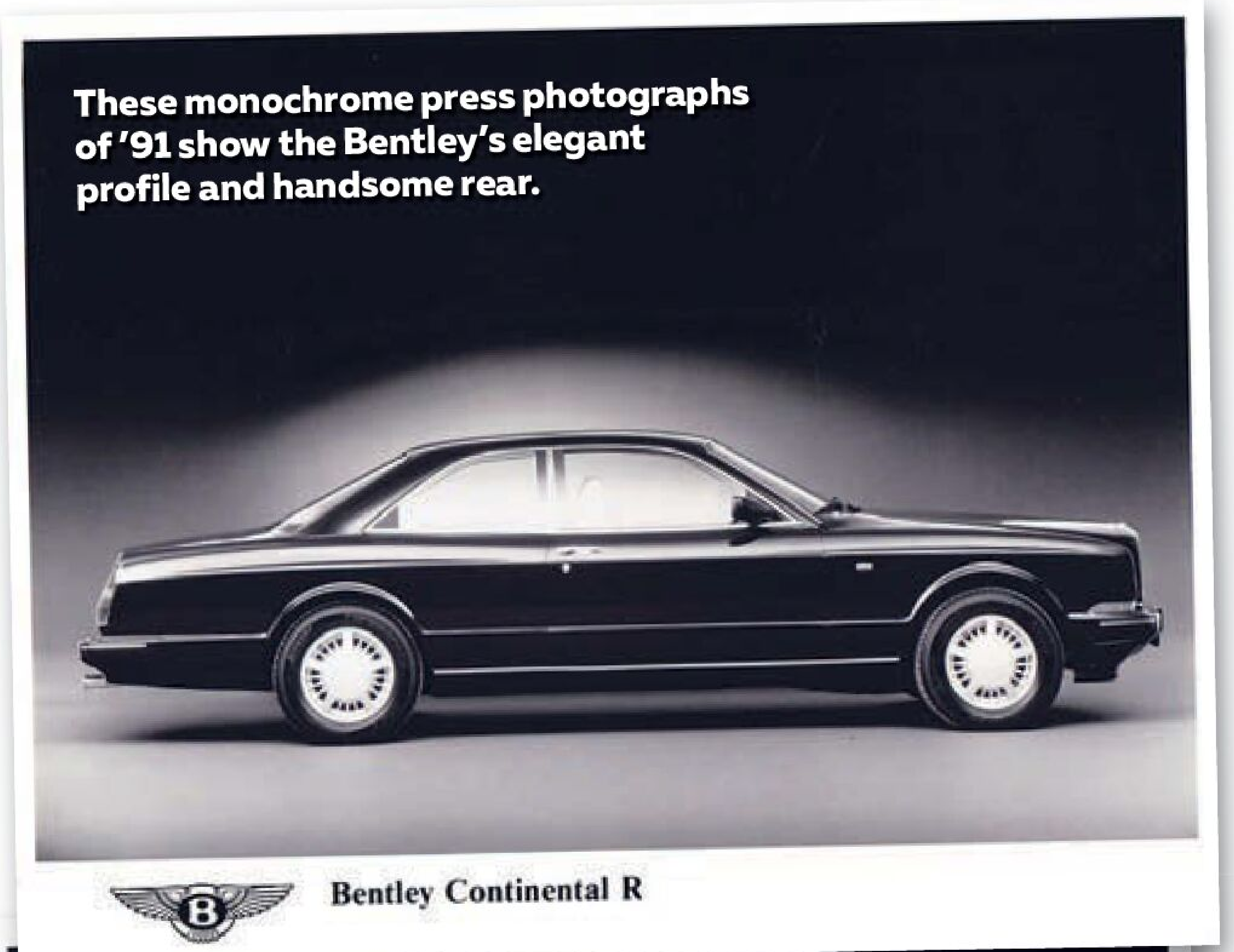
Whilst Project 90 proved there was an appetite for a new Bentley coupé, there was a realisation that existing products needed updating. Heffernan and Greenley produced about 10 proposals for future models, the majority being replacements for the ageing Corniche, a design that dated back in design (if not in name) to the late '60s. Between 1985 and '87, these gradually morphed towards Bentley, with a growing belief that if the Corniche was updated technically, its classic lines still had sales potential.

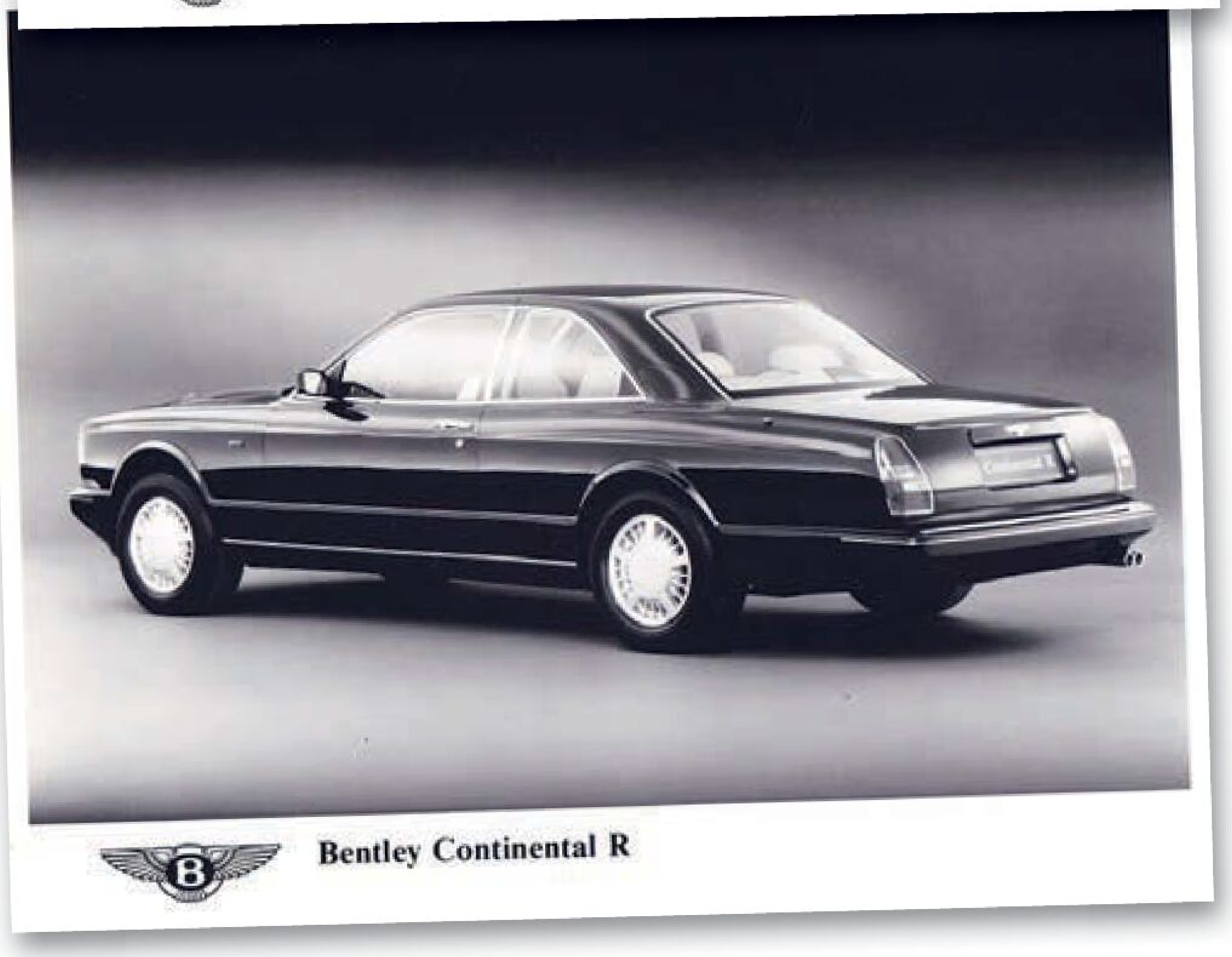
In 1986, Ward took over from Dick Perry as managing director, and 12 months later Project Nepal got the green light. Subsequent investment in tooling and engineering for the new coupé coincided, fortuitously, with global sales for both Rolls-Royce and Bentley growing in 1989/90.

Other changes were also afoot. The long-time head of design, Fritz Feller, had retired in 1984, but neither Graham Hull (manager of styling) nor Martin Bourne (assistant chief styling engineer) were promoted. Ward argued that freelance designers working with in-house experts would be a more imaginative design direction for each marque.

As Heffernan and Greenley busied themselves in a specially-built design studio at Hythe Road, developing

These monochrome press photographs of '91 show the Bentley's elegant profile and handsome rear.


Bentley Continental R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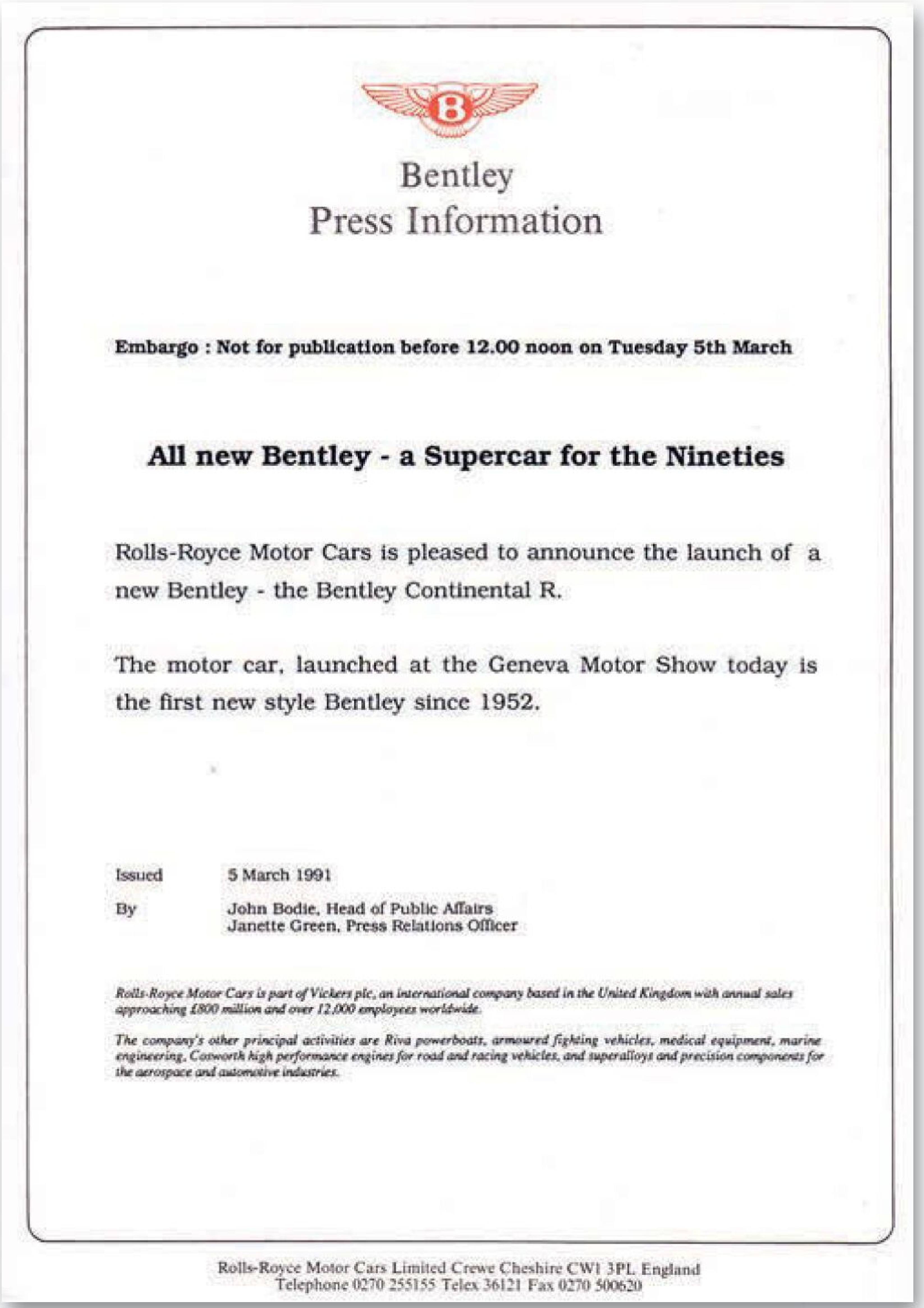

Bentley
Press Information

Embargo : Not for publication before 12.00 noon on Tuesday 5th March

All new Bentley - a Supercar for the Nineties

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is pleased to announce the launch of a new Bentley - the Bentley Continental R.

The motor car, launched at the Geneva Motor Show today is the first new style Bentley since 1952.

Issued 5 March 1991
By John Bodie, Head of Public Affairs
Janette Green, Press Relations Officer

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is part of Vickers plc, an international company based in the United Kingdom with annual sales approaching £800 million and over 12,000 employees worldwide.

The company's other principal activities are Riva powerboats, armoured fighting vehicles, medical equipment, marine engineering, Cosworth high performance engines for road and racing vehicles, and superalloys and precision components for the aerospace and automotive industries.

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Limited Crewe Cheshire CW1 3PL England
Telephone 0270 255155 Telex 36121 Fax 0270 500620

The press pack issued on March 5th, 1991 hailed the R as a "supercar for the '90s".

what would eventually become the Continental R, Hull and Bourne were at Crewe investigating the feasibility of a two-door developed from a Mulsanne bodyshell by raking the windscreen further back, combined with a modest 'Coke bottle' line over the rear haunches. Good as these were, the management encouraged Heffernan and Greenley's more radical approach for a heavily sculptured design fine-tuned by the clay modellers, who spent hundreds of hours highlighting the surfaces down to the last millimetre.

Simultaneously, wind tunnel lessons learnt from Project 90 were applied to »

Continental R

DEVELOPING THE RANGE

The first updates to the Continental R were made in 1994, when the engine's cylinder heads were redesigned to improve both torque and top-end power (to 360bhp), while wheel size was increased to 17-inch diameter. At the same time, a limited-edition model with even more power – the Continental S – was offered to existing Bentley customers, with these 37 cars providing an estimated 385bhp and shaving half a second off the 0-60mph time.

The Continental's engine received a new electronic management system and digital boost control in 1996, improving both throttle response and fuel consumption, while the air-to-air intercooler was switched for a more efficient air-to-water unit. For the first time ever, Crewe also published official power figures – with the latest Continental R now producing 385bhp as well as the highest torque of any production car (550lb.ft at 2000rpm). Top speed was increased to an artificially limited 155mph and the 0-60mph time fell below six seconds, giving the Bentley true supercar-rivalling performance. Electronic traction control was also introduced to help keep everything under control.

The ultimate version arrived in late 1996 in the form of the Continental T, featuring a wheelbase four inches shorter than that of the R, as well as noticeably extended wheelarches. Under the bonnet was a tuned engine delivering 400bhp, which was raised to 420bhp (and 650lb.ft of torque) in 1998. The Continental T was 90kg lighter than the standard Continental R, and was noticeably more responsive to drive, while its interior featured engine-turned aluminium dash panels as well as a push-button starter.

Continental T

The last major changes to the Continental range came in 1999, when Mulliner versions of the R and T were offered. In the case of the R, this meant gaining the same 420bhp engine as the standard T, while the T Mulliner benefited from uprated dampers and significantly stiffer anti-roll bars to further improve its sporting credentials. Bentley (by then owned by Volkswagen) also introduced a high degree of personalisation for the Continental, offering buyers a wider variety of power outputs and a plethora of interior and exterior options. The Continental R and T models – in both standard and Mulliner forms – remained in production until 2003, by which time a total of 1854 of all types had been built.

quarter-scale models; and although 0.35 Cd was achieved, there was once again a problem with rear-end lift. To eliminate this, Heffernan and Greenley developed the fluted wing crowns leading to the flat rear deck, while fine-tuning its relationship to the rear header and window helped to create a 40 per cent reduction in lift. Graham Hull designed new cheater door mirrors that helped keep the side windows clear, and Martin Bourne re-sculptured the radiator top tank and repositioned the vanes to obscure the mechanical hardware behind them. In the end, a Cd figure of 0.365 was achieved, significantly undercutting the saloon's 0.42.

The easy route for the interior would have been to transfer the Turbo R's in its entirety, but Ward and Hart were determined to have a unique four-seater with a through console and a floor-mounted gear shift. The interior concept might have been Heffernan's, but Hull and Bourne turned it into a true Bentley with their fine detailing of the veneers, leather and chromework.

DRIVING DYNAMICS

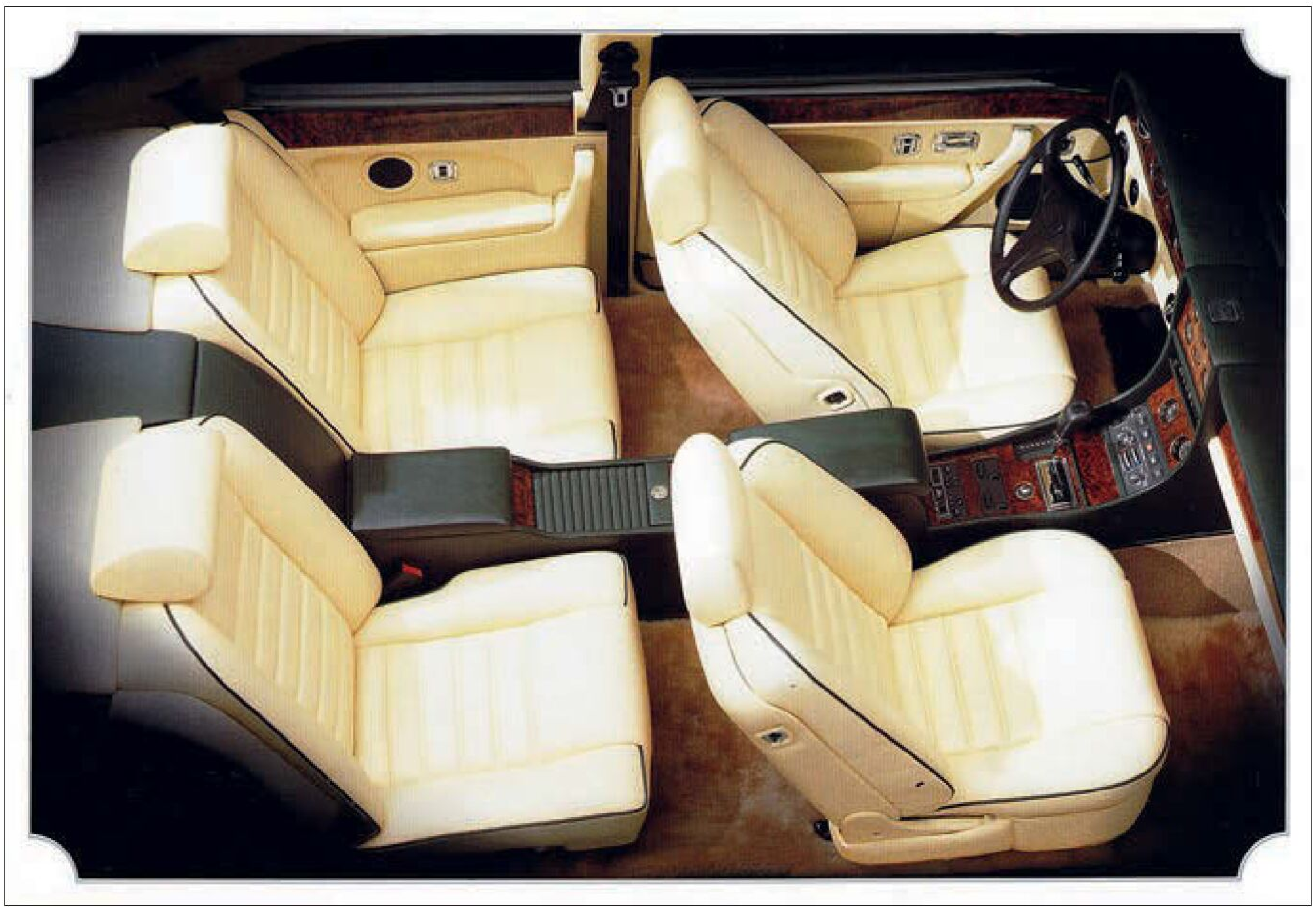
If the Continental R's styling was the most contentious issue, then its dynamics were equally challenging. The original Mulsanne Turbo might have had an impressive turn of speed for such a bulky car, but its dynamics left much to be desired and came under Mike Dunn's scrutiny. Suspension design and development engineer Peter Hill worked alongside vehicle chief engineer Phil Harding to develop Bentley's and Rolls-Royce's suspension, culminating in the Automatic Ride Control that launched in 1990, appearing a year later in the Continental R.

Although Project Nepal was conceived as essentially a rebodied Turbo R floorpan, powertrain and running gear

Bentley's proud boast was that the R offered "outstanding sporting performance".

CONTINENTAL R

Bentley's Grand Tourer for the 1990's combines a dedicated coupé body with outstanding sporting performance.
By Warren Allport


The interior of the Continental R provided the ultimate in four-seater coupé luxury.

with a new wheel/tyre package (Avon Turbospeed 255/60 ZR 16), it quickly became apparent that the coupé suffered from a harsh ride and no discernible improvements in dynamics caused by cracks appearing in the front section. Being a two-door, the car was stiffer from the A-posts rearwards, although the main problem was the front spring towers levering against the longerons, cured by using a pair of 'shotguns' running from the outer side of the spring towers back to the bulkhead.

The newcomer's powertrain at launch was, to all intents and purposes, a carry-over from the saloon, with 314bhp at 4300rpm and 485lb.ft torque at 2250rm. The challenge was to find a transmission capable of coping with those loads, with Crewe eventually settling on GM's four-speed Hydramatic 4L80-E used in both car and light truck applications, suitably refined and developed over more than a million miles of testing.

"Launching the new Bentley early and then telling customers they couldn't have one for 12 months was a risky strategy"

GLOBAL SUCCESS

As the development programme continued and more test mules were seen in public, there was growing concern that Project Nepal's existence would be revealed ahead of its scheduled 1992 launch. Moreover, there were the first hints that the global market for luxury cars was shrinking. Although there was no sense of immediate panic at Crewe, at an operations meeting in October 1990 it was decided to debut the car at the following spring's Geneva Salon – and impressively, the company's engineering department met that challenge.

Launching the car early and then telling customers they couldn't have one for 12 months was a risky strategy at a time when the motor industry was in recession. Within two weeks of the Continental R being unveiled, however, 600 cars (two years' worth of production) had been ordered, each with a £20,000 deposit. It was the first time that such a deposit had been demanded for either a Rolls-Royce or Bentley, but was instigated in an effort to deter speculators from ordering several cars and forcing prices up beyond the quoted £160,000.

The Continental R family – encompassing various updates and new-model designations during its successful career – remained in production for an impressive 12 years, bringing welcome extra revenue to Rolls-Royce Motors thanks to its positioning at the very top of the new-car price lists. More importantly, though, the Continental R helped to safeguard Bentley as a separate brand, its future reassured thanks to the vision and determination of Peter Ward and the team he gathered around him in the 1980s. ■

C1 BML
CONTINENTAL R

INTERNATIONAL SCOOP

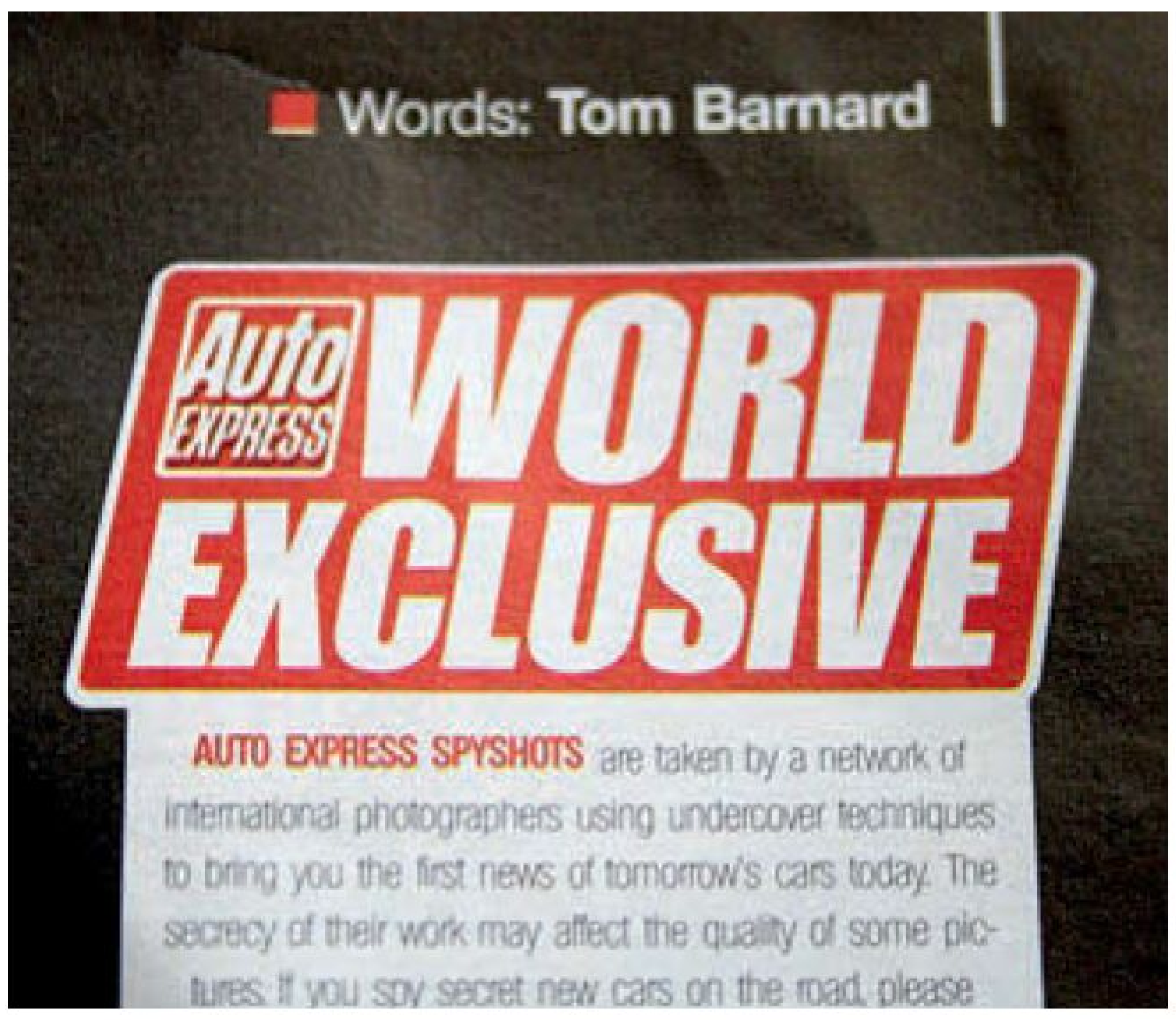
Back in 2002, the first Bentley model to be designed, developed and built under the Volkswagen Group umbrella became one of the worst-kept secrets in motoring history

Although under Volkswagen Group control since 1998, it wasn't until four years later that Bentley's biggest changes began to appear. The end of 2002 would see Rolls-Royce officially leaving Crewe, heading for its new home at Goodwood under BMW stewardship. At Bentley, meanwhile, the soon-to-be-revealed Continental GT and Flying Spur were to mark the start of a whole new era for the marque, ushering in a range of models with no connection to any previous Crewe product.

This new twosome was undoubtedly the biggest news in Bentley Motors' recent history, which inevitably meant plenty of speculation as to how the cars would look, as well as how much they would be VW-based – and of course, whether Bentley would retain any degree of independence. Ever since a deal had been struck between Volkswagen and BMW to take on Bentley and Rolls-Royce respectively, it was essential for the two brands to diverge. Understandably, having a Bentley based around a Rolls-Royce didn't sit well with Bentley owner Volkswagen, although the cessation of Silver Seraph production in 2002 at least meant the Arnage was now more of a standalone model, as well as hugely improved thanks to continuing investment by VW.

Any brand new Bentley therefore had to be different, although there were clues as to what was coming thanks to VW's efforts with its mainstream flagship brand, Audi. The A8 acquired a 12-cylinder engine in four banks of three – essentially two V6s side by side to create a W12. There was also some electronic trickery going on, including drive control systems and F1-style launch control, all of which would find their way onto the production Bentley. But we didn't know that… yet.

The new sporting Bentley was due to make its public debut at the 2003 Geneva Motor Show, but in a scoop that sent shockwaves through the car industry, it appeared virtually undisguised almost a year earlier (on March 13th, 2002) on the front cover


Words: Tom Barnard

Auto Express WORLD EXCLUSIVE

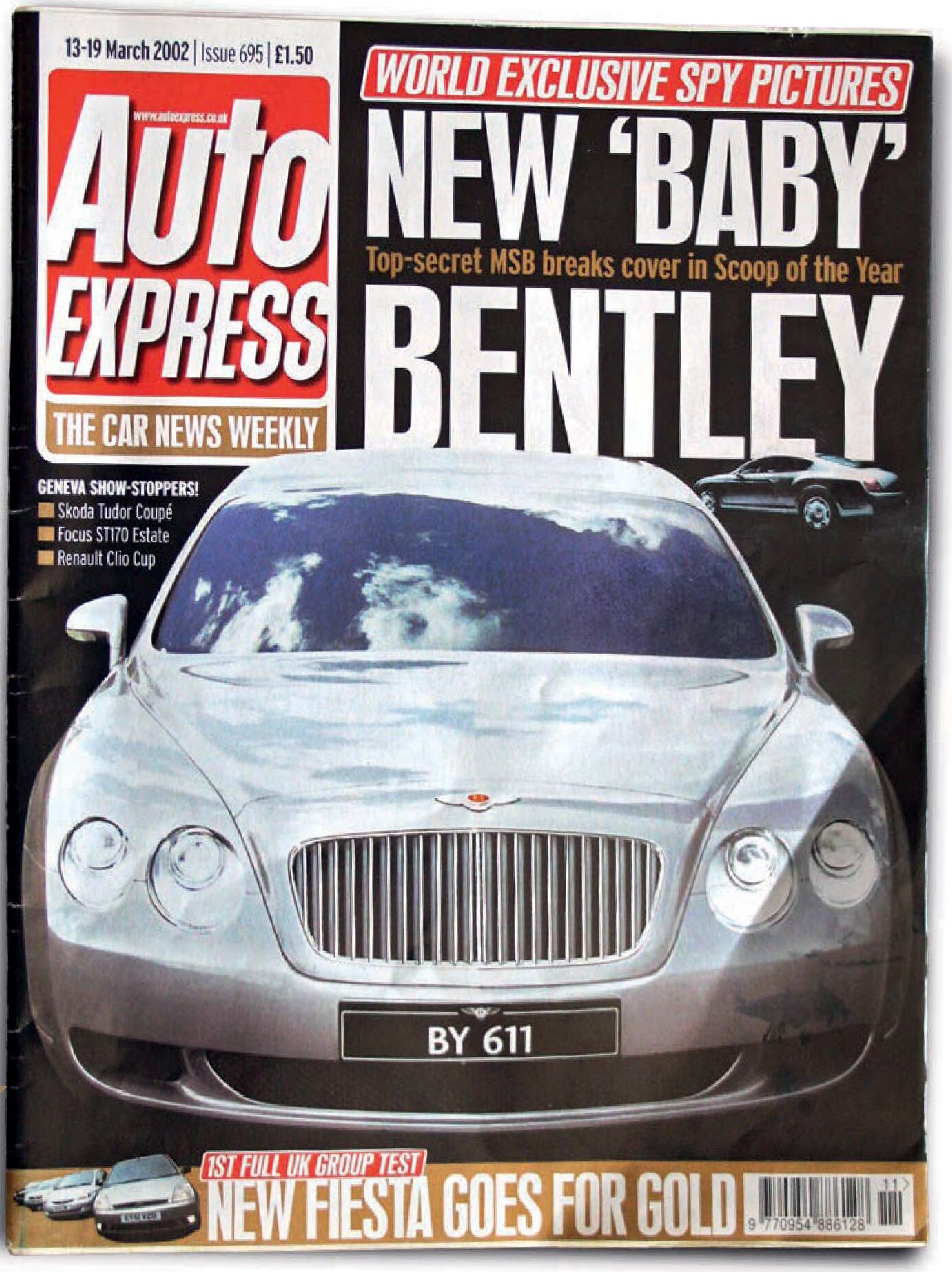
AUTO EXPRESS SPYSHOTS are taken by a network of international photographers using undercover techniques to bring you the first news of tomorrow's cars today. The secrecy of their work may affect the quality of some pictures. If you spy secret new cars on the road, please

The British weekly magazine was proud of the 'world exclusive' provided by a Bentley insider.

of Britain's best-selling weekly car magazine, *Auto Express*, a move that led to fury within Volkswagen AG and some pretty heavy-handed action from the company and its lawyers.

ANONYMOUS CALL

Tom Barnard, motoring editor of *Auto Express* at the time, was the man who broke the story: "I was in the office one morning when I picked up a call from a random stranger. He claimed that he worked at Bentley and wanted to sell us some pictures from inside the styling studio. Was I interested? Of course I was, but he wanted a brown envelope full of cash. Quite a lot of cash. If I got my hands on it, then he would meet me at a motorway service station and hand over a floppy disc (remember those?) with the pictures."



The front page that created such a strong reaction from Bentley Motors in March 2002.

To any journalist, the promise of a world exclusive is too good to pass over, but the publishing company's accounts department didn't quite see it that way. A journalist from one title asking for a cash advance akin the cost of a nearly new hatchback for something that he couldn't even prove existed set some alarm bells ringing in the company's corridors of power. "I had to go to the accounts department and ask them for several thousand pounds in cash, for an item that could be worthless and for which I would not be able to provide a receipt," recalls Tom. "They didn't laugh, instead looking at me with an expression of incredulous pity. I left empty handed."

But Tom's tenacity continued. What he was potentially sitting on was the biggest automotive news scoop of the 21st century and, like the proverbial dog with a bone, he wouldn't let go. Luckily for Tom, the magazine's publishing director, Phil Parker, was a man who liked the occasional roll of the dice, and was quite pally with the late Felix Dennis, who was owner of the publishing company, a former journalist, a lifelong eccentric and also a Bentley driver. A conversation between the two took place behind the glass façade of Phil's office, while the newsdesk staff and editor – quite literally – held the front page.

Tom recalls: "An hour later, a disgruntled-looking man from the accounts department slapped a brown envelope on my desk and told me to sign for it, before flouncing off back to his spreadsheets. I tucked the cash down the back of my trousers and headed off to a service station on the M40 for a nocturnal meeting with a man I had only spoken to on the phone. I didn't even know his name. What could possibly go wrong?

"As it happened, nothing. He knew which car I'd be in, so came out of the »

> **“A disgruntled-looking man from the accounts department slapped a brown envelope on my desk and told me to sign for it”**

shadows and sat in my passenger seat. He handed over the floppy disc that he promised contained the images, which he had helpfully printed out to show me what I was buying. They included a full set of the Continental GT [or BY 611 as it was known internally] completely undisguised, including interiors and different grille treatments. The picture we used on the cover the next week had a vertical slatted grille which never made the cut for production.”

But there was more to come, as the Continental GT scoop wasn’t the only news story to come out of the clandestine meeting. “He was quite chatty about the car, telling me some of the technical details and other stories from inside Bentley,” says Tom. “This all made great content for the magazine and we were also able to sell the pictures and our news story to other magazines around the world for a sizeable profit. The company owner was pleased and the accounts man never looked me in the eye ever again.”

MORE PHOTOGRAPHS

A fortnight later, Tom got a call on his mobile phone from a withheld number.

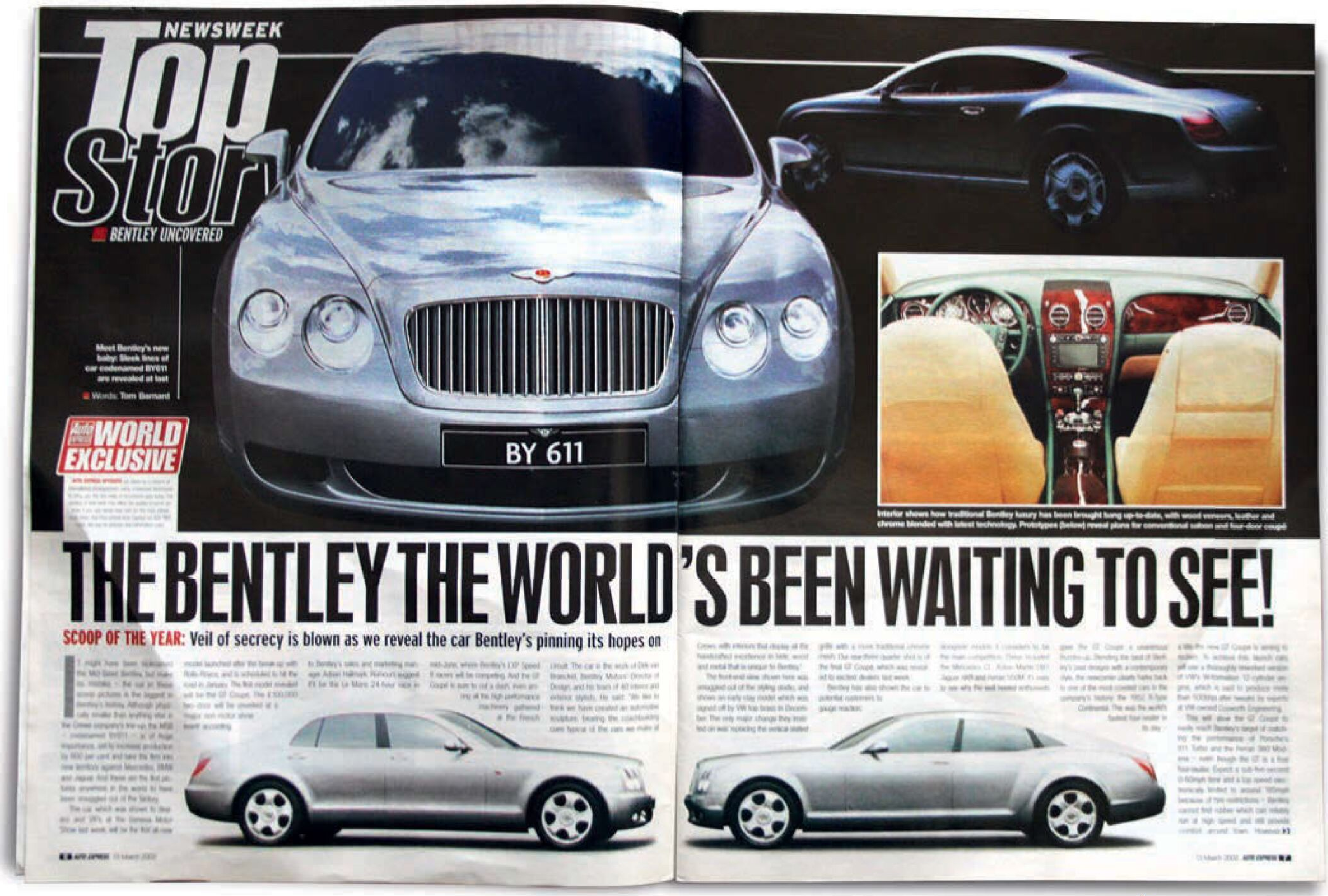
The launch of the Continental GT marked the start of a brand new direction for Bentley.

BENTLEY REINVENTED

The all-new Continental GT of 2003 combined the latest in VW Group technology with styling that was modern but with traditional Bentley overtones. It offered sharper dynamics than any previous Bentley, and was a more driver-focused car than ever before. With its 6.0-litre W12 engine producing 552bhp, the GT could sprint to 60mph in just 4.8 seconds before going on to a top speed of 198mph, while its clever air suspension (with continuously-adjusting dampers) and four-wheel drive meant there was handling and grip to match. At around the £110,000 mark, it even offered good value compared with Bentley coupés of old.

The GT was developed over the years, with 2004 seeing the addition of the Mulliner Driving Specification, an entirely cosmetic package that added bespoke wheels, two-tone leather and veneer combinations, drilled alloy pedals, quilted door and dashboard facings, and optional piano-black dashboard veneer.

The 2008 model year brought a minor



NEWSWEEK

Top Story

BENTLEY UNCOVERED

Meet Bentley's new baby: Sleek lines of car codenamed BY611 are revealed at last

Words: Tom Barnard

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

Interior shows how traditional Bentley luxury has been brought bang up-to-date, with wood veneers, leather and chrome blended with latest technology. Prototypes (below) reveal plans for conventional saloon and four-door coupé

THE BENTLEY THE WORLD'S BEEN WAITING TO SEE!

SCOOP OF THE YEAR: Veil of secrecy is blown as we reveal the car Bentley's pinning its hopes on

It was 'Mr Bentley' again: "He said he had more pictures, this time of the saloon that we later knew would be called the Flying Spur. Once again, I was dispatched to the same service station to swap brown envelopes, with less resistance from Finance this time.

"Although the Flying Spur wasn't such a scoop, what could be seen in the reflections next to it in the studio was a 4x4. The mole told me that a Volkswagen Touareg-based styling buck had been built for assessment. It later turned out that it had been rejected, only to be revived years later as the Bentayga once a management change made a 4x4 more acceptable.

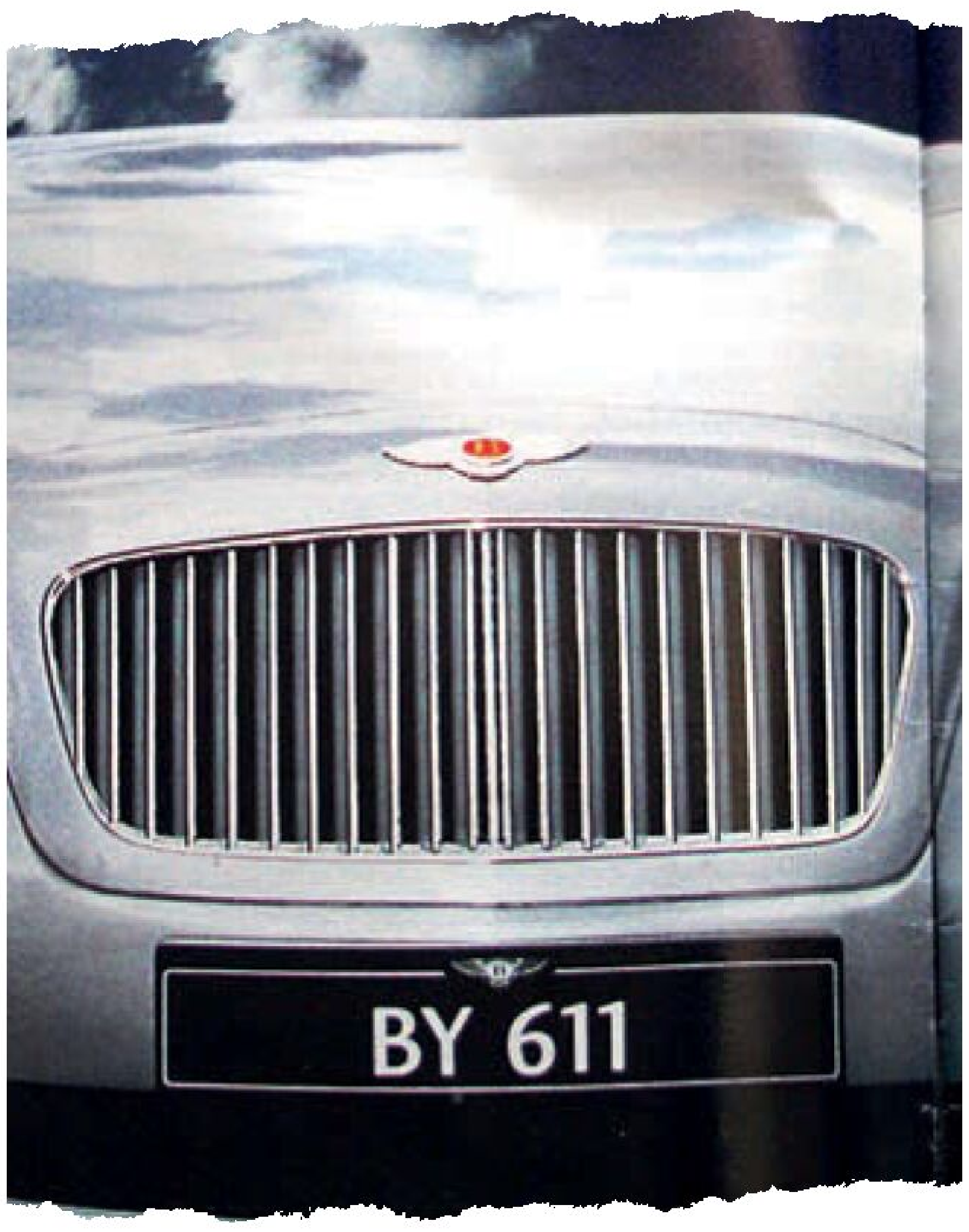
"The other car that was only just visible was the Queen's Jubilee limousine, built by Mulliner. The mole explained that the plan was for a whole series of these cars to be built for world leaders, and the Queen's would be the showcase. It was called the Diamond Series, he said. Whatever happened to this idea, I can't tell you."

What was for definite was Bentley's sense of humour failure over the situation. The company hired in private investigators to try and plug the source of the leak, and also called a freelance photographer, who had done some work for both »

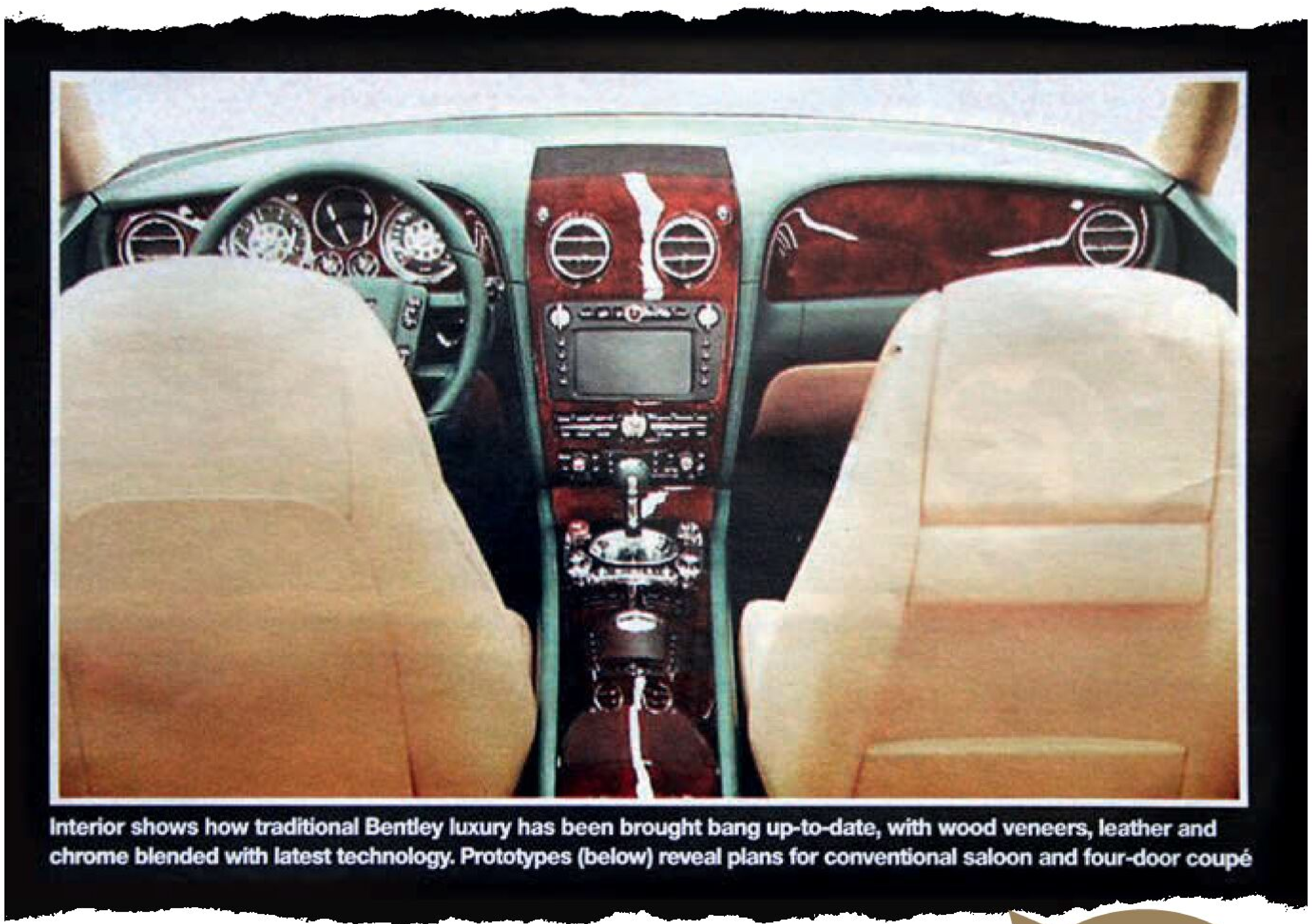
***Auto Express* also included details of a new saloon that would be launched as the Flying Spur.**

facelift for the GT, which included lighter aluminium suspension components for an improvement in ride quality, while new multi-mode variable-assistance steering injected some extra 'feel' at the wheel. Big news, however, was the arrival of the GT Speed, with an engine tuned to 602bhp – plus a lower ride height, more powerful dampers and stronger anti-roll bars, as well as unique wheels and tyres, stiffer suspension bushes and other performance-related enhancements.

For those who craved even more, 2009 saw the arrival of the GT Supersports, the fastest Bentley road car yet. With up to 630bhp on tap, it could crack 204mph and get to 100mph in just 8.9 seconds. More suspension and chassis upgrades, plus a unique four-wheel drive system with a rear-drive bias, meant the Supersports also offered phenomenal cornering ability. By 2011, however, the original-shape Continental GT was being phased out, enabling Bentley to usher in a second-generation range bearing the same name.



The vertical-slatted grille of this BY 611 developmental car never did make production.



Interior shows how traditional Bentley luxury has been brought bang up-to-date, with wood veneers, leather and chrome blended with latest technology. Prototypes (below) reveal plans for conventional saloon and four-door coupé

Bentley and *Auto Express*, to head to Crewe for a German Inquisition. It wasn't him, nor did he have the foggiest idea who it might be…

Meanwhile, VW was told to stop all advertising with *Auto Express* and its sister titles in order to hit the publishing company in the pocket, as well as banning its writers from attending VW Group press launches. But this didn't matter; the Bentley images were rattling the company's cash tin, with motoring titles from Germany, the USA, Japan and Australia all buying the rights to use them.

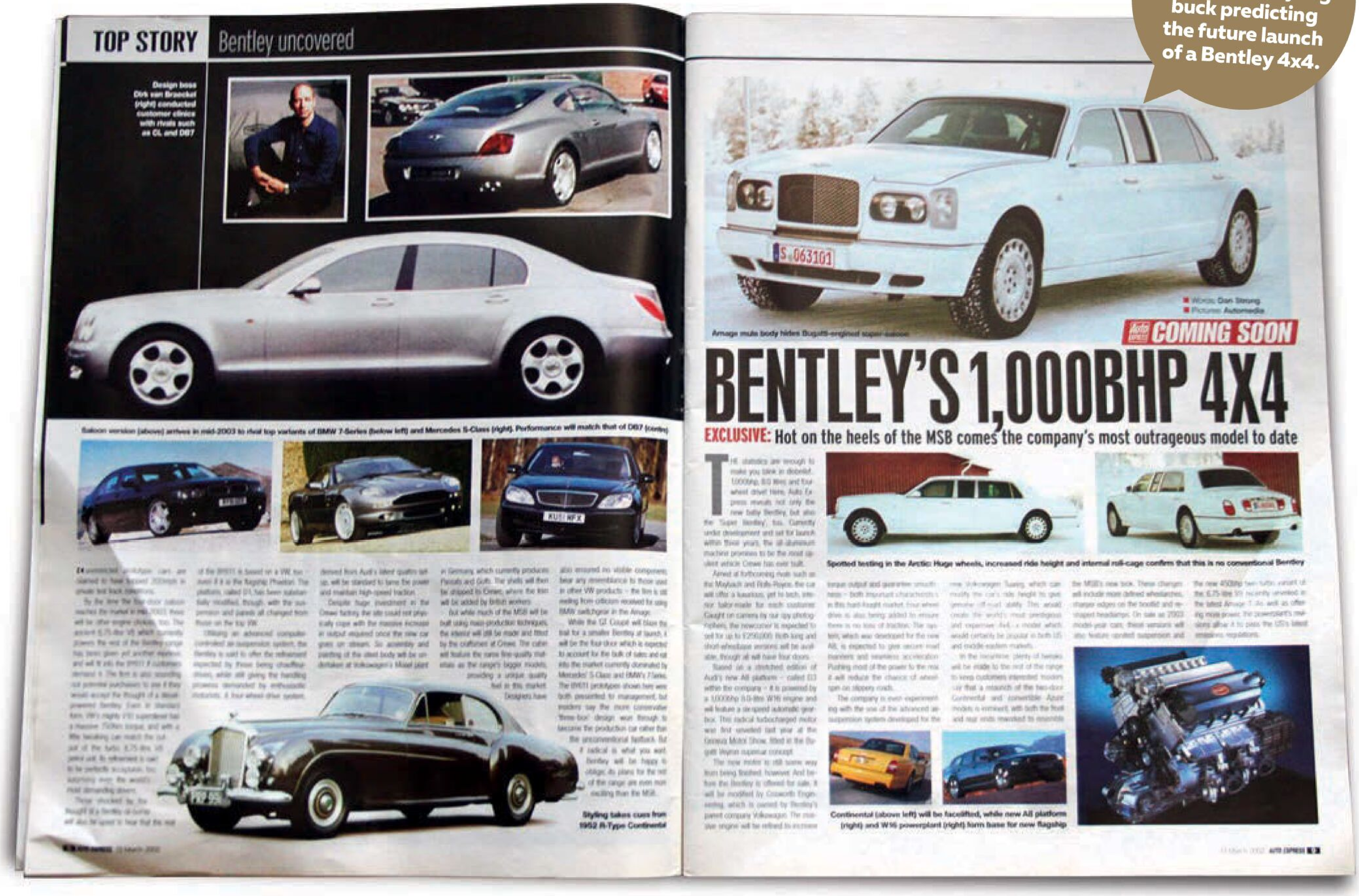
The Continental GT's cover was blown a year before it was seen in the metal, something that hadn't happened in the car industry since the Austin Metro was spotted doing road testing on the Isle of Man in 1978. But perhaps this isn't the best title in which to recall that particular story.

So, how did the battle of wills end? We'll let Tom pick up the story:

The Bentley insider even managed to provide interior shots of the pre-production GT.

At its 2003 launch, the Continental GT was hailed as a technological masterpiece.

Auto Express also featured details of a styling buck predicting the future launch of a Bentley 4x4.



TOP STORY Bentley uncovered

Design boss Dirk van Braeckel (right) conducted customer clinics with rivals such as CL and DB7

Saloon version (above) arrives in mid-2003 to rival top variants of BMW 7-Series (below left) and Mercedes S-Class (right). Performance will match that of DB7 (centre)

Styling takes cues from 1952 R-Type Continental

Arnage mule body hides Bugatti-engined super-saloon

Words: Dan Strong
Pictures: Automedia

COMING SOON

BENTLEY'S 1,000BHP 4X4

EXCLUSIVE: Hot on the heels of the MSB comes the company's most outrageous model to date

Spotted testing in the Arctic: Huge wheels, increased ride height and internal roll-cage confirm that this is no conventional Bentley

Continental (above left) will be facelifted, while new A8 platform (right) and W16 powerplant (right) form base for new flagship

"Eventually, two bigwigs from Crewe were dispatched to the *Auto Express* offices with a solicitor's letter," he recalls. "They threatened to sue us and demanded we reveal our sources. We weren't going to do that, but also understood that we were making them look a bit silly and possibly could cause some commercial harm if we carried on revealing some of the cars that were coming further in the future. And so we told them that we had pictures of the 4x4 and the Diamond limo and watched the colour drain from their faces. We suggested that we wouldn't use them if they didn't use the solicitors. Hands were shaken and I never heard from the mystery mole again."

Who was the anonymous spiller of Bentley's secrets? A disgruntled designer, a sacked senior executive, or the office cleaner? Tom never did find out, and nor did Bentley. If you're out there, sir, and you're reading this, we'd love to hear your side of the story. We'll meet you in the northbound car park at Warwick Services, next Thursday at 10.00pm. ■

> "He said he had more pictures, this time of the saloon that we later knew would be called the Flying Spur"

BATTLE OF THE COUPES

This Bentley duo offers an interesting choice for anyone in the market for a modern-classic coupé, but which one makes the most sense? We experience them both in order to find out

On the face of it, these would appear to be two very similar cars, albeit separated by an automotive generation: both expensive, glamorous two-door coupés, both bearing the winged Bentley badges and sharing the historic Continental model name that evokes images of streamlined Bentleys of the '50s whisking their occupants to the Côte d'Azur.

In practice, however, they're really very different: one is a hand-crafted exclusive product that took the ageing SZ-generation platform to its very limits, while the other was born from a brief to improve the sales volume of the Bentley brand in order to ensure its survival and is a temple to modern production processes and technology.

The pricing is perhaps the perfect illustration of their differences: the 1997 Continental R you see here would have been £187,000 before extras, while the 2008 Continental Speed GT retailed at £138,000. Factor in the decade between them and you see

just how exclusive the older car was.

Few readers will have failed to notice the rising enthusiasm for modern-classic Bentleys in recent years; and as values of early examples fall, the high-tech GT is an enticingly affordable proposition. As values of the older Continental R and T rise, meanwhile, they meet secondhand examples of the later one on their way down. So, which makes the better choice? We get behind the wheel of each in order to find out.

CONTINENTAL R

Even in a modern streetscape filled with lumbering SUVs, the Silver Spirit-based cars remain imposing vehicles and the Continental is no exception. It's based, of course, on the same floorpan as the four-door saloons, yet somehow the extravagance of having a car this size with just two doors adds to the occasion.

The Continental's shape has worn the passing of the years well, quite »

possibly because its basic three-box aesthetics weren't particularly on-trend when it first appeared. This is a product of Crewe going its own way, regardless of whatever automotive styling directions were in vogue at that moment in the mainstream market. As a result, what might at first sight seem like a straightforward two-door version of the Mulsanne/Spirit is in fact a particularly elegant piece of work and very different from its four-door sibling.

The first unique Bentley model under Rolls-Royce ownership since the 1950s, the Continental's role was to unofficially replace the Camargue as a range-topping model. As we've already revealed in this publication, it had its roots in the Project 90 concept that appeared at the 1985 Geneva motor show, produced after then managing director Peter Ward expressed a desire for a Bentley to stand apart from the Rolls-Royce models.

The total development budget for the Continental R (and its later Azure-badged convertible derivative) was tiny by motor industry standards at just £19 million, and the car entered production in 1991 at the rate of around six units per week. Although the Continental wore Mulliner badging, it was constructed at Crewe using bodyshells supplied by Park Sheet Metal of Coventry, and were very much a factory production model.

Underneath, the running gear was identical to the contemporary Turbo R, which in the case of this 1997 example means 385bhp and 553lb.ft of torque. Despite its not-inconsiderable bulk of 2.4 tonnes, that's enough to give the big coupé serious pace: 60mph from a standstill in just over six seconds, plus a top end of well over 150mph.

COACHBUILT BY
MULLINER PARK WARD

“Lift the selector, slip it into Drive and with a lean on the long-travel throttle pedal the car oozes forwards”

It might seem an odd comment about a car that was the price of a decent house when new, but next to its younger brother, the Continental R seems classy and understated. The subtly flared arches give it a quiet, muscled presence without needing enormous rims and shallow-profile rubber to make it look the part. It’s a similar story on the inside too, with the traditional wood and leather of the Rolls-Royce/Bentley cabin of the era being very different from the bright embellishments and piano black gloss of the GT.

This car predates the era when anything with sporting pretensions had to have a racy ‘engine start’ button, so waking up the familiar 6.75-litre V8 involves nothing more than twisting a key in the dash-mounted ignition, with the age of the car’s electrical architecture being betrayed by the separate alarm key fob.

The Continental R is impressively refined in the finest Crewe tradition; once you’ve swung the heavy doors shut, the engine note is reduced to a distant ‘woofling’. Lift the selector, slip it into Drive and with a lean on the long-travel throttle pedal the car oozes forwards. The R has a relaxed feel to it, which is notably different from the more eager GT, with a lazier engine note and a mellower demeanour. In urban traffic speeds, it barely needs to rise much above idle to trickle the car through traffic, but once the road clears it’s happy to oblige. A distant, almost imperceptible whistle is evidence of boost building, with the prow rising slightly as the iron hand of that 553lb.ft pushes you in the back.

TURBO
BENTLEY
ENGINE OIL

Even by today’s standards, a well set-up Turbo R or Continental R is a fast machine and it’s easy to see why road testers of the mid-1990s were so awe-struck; quite simply, a car of this bulk didn’t really have any right to exhibit such pace. In some ways, however, the Continental R’s age does show – the pattering over broken road surfaces for example, which the more rigid GT has licked courtesy of modern computer-aided bodyshell design. »

Nevertheless, for what's almost a 30-year-old car it's mightily impressive.

CONTINENTAL GT

The story behind the Continental R's high-tech descendant is a familiar one, so we'll keep the recap brief. When Volkswagen Group outbid BMW for Rolls-Royce in 1998, it later discovered that the rights to the Rolls-Royce trademark weren't part of the deal, which presented a fairly major blow to making the cars bearing the name. With VW then claiming that the Bentley brand was the prize it had wanted all along, a deal was eventually arrived at whereby Rolls-Royce cars would be built at Crewe until the end of 2002, with January of the following year seeing custodianship of the brand moving across to BMW and production shifted to a brand new plant at Goodwood. At that point, the historic Crewe factory – under Volkswagen control – would produce only Bentley-branded cars.

A new Volkswagen Group model was already well under way in the unlikely shape of the VW Phaeton, said to be a pet project of company chief Ferdinand Piëch. It contained all the elements that would later go into creating the Continental GT, chief among them the W12 engine. Looking like a slightly bloated Passat, the anonymous Phaeton was packed with high-tech and, although in many ways a massively costly folly, it did allow VW to fast-track development of the all-important new Bentley.

The W12 engine first appeared in

the Audi A8 of 2001 before being employed in the Phaeton the following year, although in Audi and VW guise it produced 'only' 414bhp. In order to match the mighty heft of the old Turbo R models that Bentley customers were used to, it needed more – something that was duly achieved by bolting up a pair of KKK 'blowers' alongside much modification of the block and internals. The result was a handy 552bhp, backed up with 479lb.ft torque at just 1600rpm, driving through a six-speed ZF automatic specially developed for the car and adapted to work with its standard four-wheel drive.

All this technology was wrapped up in a body that was claimed to have been styled in-house in Bentley's Crewe studios, but which was actually the work of Dirk van Braeckel, a Belgian designer who had begun his VW Group career at Audi before heading up Skoda prior to his move to Cheshire. His brief was to recapture the Bentley heritage without producing something self-consciously retro… and he duly delivered. With its short front overhang and muscled haunches, the Continental GT had overtones of the R-Type Continental of the '50s but with a thoroughly modern, clean look. »

> **"The Continental GT was announced on March 3rd, 2003 – and by March 24th a staggering 3200 deposits had been taken"**

6.0 LITRE
BENTLEY
TWIN TURBO

The structure of the bodyshell itself was impressive, too. One of Piëch's goals with the Phaeton had been class-leading torsional rigidity and the Bentley followed suit. Making a car this size – especially one with pillarless side glass – rigid without being massively heavy is a big ask, but by using technology that included adhesive bonding and laser welding, VW and Bentley were able to keep kerb weight down to 2350kg. It's a hefty beast, but not as hefty as it could be considering it can seat four six-foot adults in comfort, yet achieve 198mph and sprint to 60mph in an impressive 4.7 seconds.

Underneath was found wishbones at each corner with anti-roll bars and an electronically controlled air suspension that allowed the car to squat by 15mm at 100mph. On the inside, the GT was a neat mixture of new world and old, with the high-tech elements neatly offset by subtle use of leather and hand finishing.

The Continental GT was announced to the press on March 3rd, 2003 at the Geneva motor show – and by March 24th, a staggering 3200 deposits had been taken for the new car. The enthusiasm was no doubt fuelled by the price, which at £110,000 was almost half that of the older, hand-built Bentleys.

After driving the older Continental, the GT is something of a culture shock. It's obviously a much more modern car and even before you get as far as the driving seat you'll have noticed little touches like the double-glazed side windows and the way the glass drops to clear the seal as you pull the door handle. Inside, anyone who has spent time in a modern Audi will find the controls familiar, albeit many of

> **"The total development budget for the Continental R was tiny by car industry standards at just £19 million"**

CONTINENTAL R

LIVING WITH THE CARS

Under the skin, the Continental R is essentially a big Turbo R, which means it's pretty much like any other member of the SZ family to live with. Your big issue will be the hydraulics, which if neglected can get costly when seals and similar need replacing – and remember, these cars use the hydraulics for the self-levelling as well as the brakes. As for parts availability, the bulk of the mechanical bits are shared with the saloons, so the usual Rolls-Royce and Bentley independent specialists will be able to oblige.

Since the Continental R arrived late in the production of the SZ-generation cars, it benefits from the improvements made over the Turbo's lifetime, and so a good one can prove very reliable, especially if it's used regularly.

The Continental GT can also prove to be a reliable bet… but that's only if you buy wisely and have a good helping of luck. Early cars can now be had for as little as £12,000-£15,000 in the UK, but it's those early ones that suffered from the bigger problems, especially with the electrical system. One major issue involved the drain holes becoming blocked, which tended to cause the interior to fill with water over time. With various control modules positioned low in the footwell, this played havoc with the electrical system but can easily be avoided if the drains are checked regularly.

Elsewhere, the W12 engine needs its cooling system to be up to scratch, so check the radiator and hoses for damage, while oil smoke suggesting worn turbos will obviously be bad news. Service items are dearer than the GT's VW/Audi roots would suggest, so make sure you have a decent budget for ongoing maintenance – and never buy an example that's lacking a full service history. When buying, don't forget to check the obvious: tyres are expensive and the split rim wheels are known to corrode.

them with a garnish of bright metal, a machined finish or similar to suit the Bentley's more extrovert cabin and remind you that this is no A4. This certainly isn't a criticism; after all, if you're going to borrow switchgear from anywhere, Audi is just about as good as it gets and there's no argument that the GT is beautifully put together.

The mighty W12 – which is in essence a pair of VW's VR6 engines on a common crank – springs to life either by twisting the key or jabbing the console-mounted start button, and its idle tells you just how different from the Continental R the GT's character is. With half as many cylinders again, it seems busier at tickover, more urgent but no less refined, although a blip of the throttle reveals an exhaust note that hints very obviously at the huge power on tap.

Pressing the big Bentley logo and selecting Drive, the car is more eager from a standstill than the older Continental and noticeably more responsive to smaller throttle inputs; and yet despite its size, it's no more demanding to drive than a Golf. The steering at parking speeds is fingertip-light and the good visibility makes it easy to place in a crowded car park.

Out on the road, the GT is supremely refined and the way in which the immensely rigid shell manages to shrug off most of our scarred tarmac is one of the most noticeable differences between the two cars. Of course, the W12 is quite happy pootling along in the school run traffic, but when there's a clear stretch of road – and seriously, you'll need a fairly long bit of road – an ample squeeze of the pedal sees it surge forwards in a way the older Bentley can't hope to match. The huge torque makes it feel lighter than it really is, while the four-wheel drive gives it a 'planted' feel that makes it seem immensely secure.

On our test drive near the Midlands headquarters of marque specialist Balmoral UK, we were barely able to scratch at the car's huge performance, but we know from previous experience that these big coupés can really be made to hustle. Ultimately, the strength of the Continental GT is in the way it manages to be so very ordinary in some ways and remain utterly outrageous in others, while conveying just as much a sense of occasion as the older car. Here is a Bentley your granny could happily drive to the supermarket, and if she sneezed at the wrong moment could easily find herself touching nearly 200mph without noticing.

OUR VERDICT

As we said at the beginning, these are two very different cars, which makes it both very easy and almost impossible to choose between them. The Continental GT is a car you could use every day, all year round, while the Continental R is of the age where to do that to it would be a shame. It's a car for special occasions, to be savoured and enjoyed as a reminder of times long gone, when Bentley didn't need to worry too much about sales figures or the tastes of Premier League players.

The Continental R is also likely to provide a very handy return on your investment in the medium term, with values of fine examples seemingly on the up. By comparison, an excellent example of a 10- or 15-year-old Continental GT is still in the depreciation zone, making it a financially less astute choice. The GT is, of course, the car that brilliantly reinvented Bentley for the 21st century, but the Continental R's more traditional appeal makes it our ultimate choice here. ■

THANK YOU: We're grateful to Balmoral UK, based in the West Midlands, for supplying the cars featured here. To see the latest stock, visit www.balmoraluk.com.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

	1997 Continental R	2008 GT Speed
Engine	6750cc V8	5998 W12
Transmission	5-speed auto	6-speed auto
Power	385bhp	602bhp
Torque	553lb.ft	553lb.ft
Top speed	151mph	202mph
0-60mph	6.1 secs	4.3 secs
Length	5.3 metres	4.8 metres
Weight	2402kg	2350kg

TOP 10 CLASSIC BENTLEYS

If you're in the market for a post-war classic Bentley, the good news is that there's no shortage of choice, ranging in age from the late 1940s through to the early years of the 21st century.

With something to suit just about every taste, this is a marque with lots to offer today's buyer. And the best news of all is that whether you have a four-, five- or six-figure budget, there's a Bentley out there that's within your financial grasp – and which might just tempt you.

Over the next few pages, we take a look at 10 of today's top Bentley buys, focusing on the models that emanated from Crewe and which did so much to expand the marque's popularity. It's certainly an eclectic list, which starts with the 'Standard Steel' MkVI saloon and finishes with the first-generation Continental GT of 2003-on.

Whatever your taste in Bentley-style luxury or performance motoring, there's sure to be something here that appeals.

BENTLEY MkVI & R-TYPE (1946-1955)

As Bentley's inaugural post-war launch as well as the marque's first model to be built at Crewe, the MkVI marked the start of a new era. Crucially, however, it was also the first Bentley to be sold as a factory-built complete car, with every previous model having been supplied to coachbuilders as a rolling chassis.

Using a shortened version of the Rolls-Royce Silver Wraith chassis (120 instead of 127 inches) and the same 4257cc straight-six engine (later increased to 4566cc), the MkVI featured an all-steel welded body produced by Pressed Steel and painted and trimmed at Crewe. For those needing something more stand-out, bare rolling chassis could be provided, with such revered coachbuilders as James Young, Park Ward, Hooper and Mulliner all creating bodies in a variety of different styles.

Over 5200 MkVIs had been built by the time it was replaced by the R-Type in 1952, the newcomer being broadly similar but with an extended boot. The R-Type had the option of a four-speed automatic transmission from the start and would become the last Bentley to be offered with a manual gearbox.

For both the MkVI and R-Type, rust in the 'Standard Steel' body is the biggest issue, with the sills and wings being the main areas to check, especially around any attachments such as lamps or trim. The roof panel is also prone to rot around the sunroof. If buying a car that's previously been restored, ask for photographic proof of the work carried out and ensure it's done to the kind of standard you'd expect with any Bentley.

Both cars are mechanically robust, although the rear axle and servo-mechanical brake system are prone to wear when neglected. While most MkVIs come with the smaller engine of the early cars, all R-Type buyers benefit from the 4.7-litre unit, most often combined with automatic transmission. The condition of the gearbox, brakes and rear axle should be a priority as these parts are expensive to refurbish or replace.

WHAT TO PAY

PROJECT: £10,000-£15,000

GOOD: £30,000-£50,000

EXCELLENT: £50,000-£70,000

BENTLEY S-SERIES (1955-1965)

The handsome 'Standard Steel' Bentley S-series (also available in Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud guise) featured a brand new chassis and freshly-penned factory bodywork by John Blatchley, with significantly larger proportions than the R-Type that it replaced.

The newcomer's suspension was improved, allowing for a softer ride without sacrificing stability or roadholding; the steering was redesigned for lighter action and greater accuracy, with power steering becoming an optional extra; and the brakes went over to a fully hydraulic system, albeit still with the distinctive mechanical servo arrangement.

The familiar straight-six engine was increased in size to 4887cc and the four-speed automatic gearbox became standard. October 1959, however, saw the arrival of the S2, with the six-cylinder being dropped in favour of the new L-Series V8 engine in 6.25-litre form. Then in 1962 came the S3, the most noticeable feature being the new quad-lamp front end, while the previously all-wood dashboard gained a padded leather top and surround.

Over 7000 examples of the S-series were built during its 10-year career, although almost half of those were of the 'S1' variety; from the S2 onwards, Bentleys began to be outsold by their Rolls-Royce equivalent. The S-series is a large car even by Bentley standards, and represented a real step forward for the marque in terms of refinement, high-speed abilities and all-round feeling of luxury. These days, it remains an understandably popular choice on the classic market.

Bodywork rust is the real danger when buying (any major rot in the extremely robust chassis is unusual), closely followed by slapdash previous restoration efforts. The four-piece sills, inner front wings, rear floor and front body mountings are the key areas to investigate. Putting right any paint or trim issues to the correct standard will be very costly; and while the V8 engine is long-lived, it's important to check that its coolant is clean and its oil changes have been regular. Beware of any engines that rattle or knock, as these units should be near-silent in normal operation.

WHAT TO PAY

PROJECT: £10,000-£15,000

GOOD: £25,000-£45,000

EXCELLENT: £50,000-£80,000

Photos: Vintage & Prestige (vandp.net)

BENTLEY T-SERIES (1965-1980)

The T-series was the 'Winged B' version of the ground-breaking Silver Shadow, incorporating all of the newcomer's advanced features – including unitary construction, hydraulic-assisted fully independent coil-sprung suspension, power-hydraulic brakes and standard-fit power steering. Both cars impressed with their surefooted feel, considering these were luxury saloons measuring in at around 17 feet and tipping the scales at well over two tonnes.

Unfortunately for Bentley, while the T-series was an engineering triumph, it represented something of a low point for the marque commercially, making up less than 10 per cent of total production for the Silver Shadow family. It benefited from the same upgrades throughout its career, including adoption of the larger 6.75-litre V8 in 1970 and the arrival of the T2 seven years later – that final update bringing rack and pinion steering, improved handling, an updated fascia, larger rubber-faced bumpers and twin-zone climate control.

Fewer than 2500 T-series were made in total, and these days it's seen as a distinctive and collectable alternative to the more commonplace Silver Shadow. It shares all the fine qualities of the Rolls-Royce, being a superb all-rounder with a very real sense of luxury and 'specialness'. Perhaps more than any other car in this section, however, you need to check any prospective purchase carefully as owning a bad T-series can be a miserable and expensive experience.

Corrosion in the body (particularly where the sills join the front wings, the front and rear valances, the inner rear wings, lower rear quarter panels, rear wheelarches and front subframe) is commonplace, as are poor quality previous repairs. The suspension must work correctly, both in terms of levelling the car and providing a suitably good ride. Leaks from corroded joints and perished hoses on both the suspension and brakes are a cause for concern, as are any signs of worn bushes in the suspension. And, of course, putting right any tatty veneer or torn leather is expensive, as is sorting out a defunct climate control system.

WHAT TO PAY

PROJECT: £5000-£8000

GOOD: £15,000-£20,000

EXCELLENT: £25,000-£38,000

CORNICHE & CONTINENTAL (1971-1995)

Although the Silver Shadow and T-series used all-steel monocoque construction, Rolls-Royce knew there would still be demand for a traditional coachbuilt derivative. That's why Mulliner Park Ward (a Rolls-Royce subsidiary since 1961) introduced two-door coupé and convertible versions of the model, originally launched as members of the Silver Shadow family before being relaunched as the Corniche in 1971.

As with the standard T-series, the Bentley Corniche was effectively no different to the Rolls-Royce version other than in grille and trim, with the Spirit of Ecstasy upholding the trend of outselling the 'Winged B' – with just 69 Bentley Corniche convertibles and 77 Bentley Corniche coupés being built between 1971 and '84. By then, management was embarking on a process of revitalising Bentley (aided by the turbocharged saloons), hence the decision to resurrect the Continental name for the two-door Bentley. Hardtop Corniches hadn't been offered since 1981, which explains why the new Continental was convertible-only.

When they were new, these two-door Bentleys were among the most expensive production cars in the world, and nowadays it's easy to see the appeal of adding either coupé style or wind-in-the-hair motoring to the classic T-series experience. Whether it's a Corniche or a Continental, the lucky owner will get to enjoy a craftsman-built machine that turns heads and is ideal for long-distance summer touring.

When buying, the same rust checks as for a saloon version apply to the sills (especially towards the front), rear inner wings (plus the inside of the hood well on convertibles), the base of the screen pillars, the front and rear valances and the boot floor. The paintwork needs to be perfect, too, unless you're buying a project car to improve. Be sure that the suspension, brakes and steering work as they should, and that the hydraulic fluid is fresh and there aren't any leaks. The soft-top itself can suffer with age, especially the Vybak rear window, and replacing it is inevitably a complex and expensive job.

WHAT TO PAY

PROJECT: £12,000-£20,000

GOOD: £35,000-£70,000

EXCELLENT: £80,000-£100,000

MULSANNE, EIGHT & BROOKLANDS (1980-1998)

With Rolls-Royce keen to give Bentley sales a boost in the '80s, the first small but important step was the launch of the new Silver Spirit-based Mulsanne in October 1980. As with the T-series, the newcomer was still little more than a rebadged version of the latest Rolls-Royce, with no mechanical or performance alterations, but there were rumours that something more exciting was in the offing, as you'll read opposite.

The Mulsanne was joined by an entry-level model in 1984, featuring slightly downgraded trim and a more accessible list price, badged as the new Bentley Eight and aimed at a slightly younger audience. This sold well through to 1992, when both it and the more expensive Mulsanne were phased out in favour of the Bentley Brooklands, a model that effectively bridged the gap between those two previous saloons.

Any of these normally-aspirated SZ-series Bentleys is an attractive proposition today. Prices have shown an upward trend in recent years, which means that although it's still possible to pick up a roadworthy car at a low price, the best examples have risen. Keep it in the same condition and your Bentley might just be a long-term investment.

Be careful if considering any Mulsanne, Eight or Brooklands that seems strangely cheap, as the cost of rectification can easily outweigh the end value. A detailed service history from an official dealer or independent specialist will, of course, be a huge bonus. And while the SZ Bentleys were better protected against rot than the old T-series, you still need to check the sills, lower front wings, rear arches, lower quarters and spring mounts for corrosion.

Cosmetic issues like cracked veneer, ripped leather and crazed paintwork point to a car that's been run on a shoestring, as do mismatched tyres from bargain basement brands. There are more electronic systems in cars of this age, and you certainly want to see the major ones – suspension control, anti-lock brakes and climate control – working as they should.

WHAT TO PAY

PROJECT: £2500-£7000
GOOD: £9000-£12,000
EXCELLENT: £15,000-£25,000

MULSANNE TURBO & TURBO R (1982-1998)

The revitalisation of Bentley really got moving in 1982 with the launch of the Mulsanne Turbo, the first Bentley in several decades to be mechanically different from its Rolls-Royce sibling. In fact, the Mulsanne Turbo offered more 'oomph' than any previous Crewe product, with 50 per cent extra power thanks to the addition of a single turbocharger to the 6.75-litre V8 engine, giving the newcomer a sub-seven-second 0-60mph time and a top speed of over 135mph.

The only weakness was that the rest of the Mulsanne Turbo's running gear couldn't match the sporting ability of the engine, a situation solved in 1985 with the arrival of the Turbo R, benefiting from a thorough overhaul to its suspension, steering and brakes, as well as aerodynamic improvements to increase stability. Once the temperamental carburettors were replaced by fuel-injection in 1986 (bringing with it a small hike in power), the Turbo R was hailed as one of the finest cars of its era, and before long Bentley sales were matching those of Rolls-Royce.

The appeal of either of these 'blown' Bentleys is obvious. In many ways they are the ultimate luxury motor car of their era, with few peers in any class when it comes to either opulence or performance – although service history is the key to confidence when buying any turbocharged Bentley. Only the very brave will consider taking on a project with a dubious past.

Bodywork problems are the same as for any SZ-generation Bentley, so check carefully for rot – particularly in the sills, arches, rear lower corners and front subframe. Watch for plumes of blue smoke from the exhaust or lacklustre performance, which both point to a worn turbo. Listen and feel for signs of worn front ball joints and check the tyres for uneven wear. As with all hydropneumatic cars, make sure the suspension levels correctly, isn't dripping fluid and isn't too harsh due to tired spheres. You also want the best-condition interior you can find, as refurbishment can be very expensive.

WHAT TO PAY

PROJECT: £3000-£8000

GOOD: £10,000-£18,000

EXCELLENT: £20,000-£30,000

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL R & T (1991-2002)

As you'll already have read elsewhere, the last stage in the decade-long rehabilitation of Bentley was the launch of the Continental R at the 1991 Geneva Motor Show. Here was a truly unique Bentley, with the drivetrain and running gear of the Turbo R being placed into an eye-catching coupé body and treated to one of the most famous and prestigious names in Bentley history. The Continental R was a worthy flagship, being the most expensive production car in the world at the time of its launch, as well as one of the fastest.

Improvements were made over time, with new engine management, traction control and an air-to-water intercooler arriving by the mid-1990s. Output then stood at a mighty 385bhp, but shortly afterwards along came the Continental T – complete with a shorter-wheelbase platform, extended wheelarches, wider wheels and an engine tuned to a whopping 400bhp.

The appeal of a faster, sleeker, more driver-focused and exclusive Bentley will be obvious to many enthusiasts, and the Continental certainly delivers. As befits its name, the Continental of the '90s was designed and tuned for long-distance, high-speed driving while two-up with luggage. The fierce acceleration and surging performance (all coming in a hushed, effortless way that has to be experienced to be believed) may tickle your fancy, but the car's low-speed ride quality isn't as good as that of its four-door sibling.

With its unique bodywork, corrosion problems on a Continental can be very difficult to solve, so check the wheelarches on both sides as well as the area around the front of the sills and the door shuts. Continental Ts have plastic sill covers that can hide serious rot, and on all versions look for electrolytic corrosion on the doors, bonnet and bootlid. Be sure that the electric seats work, as the ECUs for these are prone to trouble and expensive. Mechanical and running gear checks are essentially the same as for the Turbo R.

WHAT TO PAY

PROJECT: £18,000-£25,000

GOOD: £30,000-£50,000

EXCELLENT: £60,000-£90,000

BENTLEY AZURE (1995-2003)

Effectively a convertible version of the Continental R, the Azure provided Bentley with a bespoke new flagship when it made its debut in 1995 at the Geneva motor show. A total of 1311 examples of the first-generation Azure went on to be hand-crafted during its eight-year career, a respectable figure considering how expensive this stunning soft-top really was.

By 1996, the Azure's first full year on sale, this range-topping Bentley cost £215,000 in the UK, at a time when the Continental R was listed at just over £180,000. Indeed, so expensive was the Azure, you could instead have bought two Rolls-Royce Silver Spirit IIIs and still have £5000 left over for an exotic holiday.

Among the first-generation Azures produced were 155 examples of the Continental T-engined Mulliner, an uprated version that arrived in 1999. The car shown here is one of just 23 right-hand drive Mulliners, proudly showing the various styling changes that included mesh vents to the front wings and bumper, 'dual twin' exhaust tailpipes, a wider track and special badging. The Mulliner ran on 18-inch five-spoke alloy wheels shod in Pirelli P-Zero 285/45 tyres.

A second-generation Azure debuted in 2006, three years after the demise of the original, this time sharing the Arnage platform. Two years later, it spawned a coupé derivative going by the name of Brooklands. Production of the second series Azure lasted until 2010, with production totalling 796 cars – including 80 of the mighty 500bhp Azure Ts.

If you're in the market for a first-series Azure, you'll need to follow the same guidelines as for the Continental R. Both rear wheelarches need careful examination, as do the sills, and you should be checking for electrolytic corrosion on the doors, bonnet and bootlid. This time, you also have the added complication of a soft-top, so inspect this very carefully as a high-quality replacement will be expensive; look for signs of wear and damage, and have a good feel around inside the car for any indication of water ingress.

WHAT TO PAY

PROJECT: £25,000-£30,000

GOOD: £40,000-£70,000

EXCELLENT: £80,000-£125,000

BENTLEY ARNAGE (1998-2009)

As we examine in detail starting on page 84, Bentley Motors began a whole new chapter with the Arnage. Along with its Rolls-Royce Silver Seraph sibling, this was the first truly new car – in terms of platform and engineering – to come out of Crewe since the Silver Shadow and T-series of 1965. The Arnage's styling might have had retro overtones, but under the bonnet was true modernity thanks to the traditional Rolls-Royce V8 being dropped in favour of a BMW-supplied 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8 pushing out 354bhp.

Complications over the sale of Rolls-Royce Motors during the Arnage's launch year led to major changes, with new custodian Volkswagen re-engineering the car to take the old L-series V8 after all, installing it in the new Arnage Red Label model from October 1999. It proved popular, resulting in the BMW engine being phased out a few months later.

The 2001 launch of the long-wheelbase Arnage RL coincided with Bentley using a radically revised and modernised twin-turbo version of the 6.75-litre V8, retaining little of the original engine other than its basic layout and cylinder dimensions. The Arnage T (spiritual successor to the Turbo R) then arrived in 2002, with over 450bhp on tap. Mechanical revisions – including six-speed transmission – were made in 2007, with the final Arnage being built two years later.

These later (non-BMW) V8s can be prone to head gasket issues. You need to be on the look-out for leaks around the cylinder heads and air intake, pointing to neglected servicing. The old front ball joint weakness is still there, and you should watch for scored, warped or worn brake discs and pads. Electric glitches are often caused by incorrect batteries, as the Arnage has two and both need to be of the correct spec. Door handles, mirrors and badges can be starting points for panel corrosion, and it's not rare to find an Arnage with rust issues at the rear of its sills and around its rear suspension mounts.

WHAT TO PAY

PROJECT: £8,000-£12,000

GOOD: £15,000-£25,000

EXCELLENT: £30,000-£35,000

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT (2003-2011)

Once under Volkswagen control, Bentley focused on putting its new-model plans into action, leading to the launch of the Continental GT in 2003. It was the first Bentley with four-wheel drive, and was smaller, sportier and more affordable than recent efforts from Crewe. Marking a complete break with Bentley tradition, the GT employed a VW-derived platform, transmission, adjustable air suspension and intriguing W12 engine – the latter boasting twin turbochargers and an output of 552bhp.

Revisions in 2008 brought lightweight suspension and improved steering, with variable assistance for more 'feel', while the addition of the GT Speed meant more power and further-tweaked suspension. This was joined by the Supersports the following year, with over 600bhp, ceramic brakes and a rear-biased transmission.

The Continental GT offers a very different take on the idea of a modern-classic Bentley. This is a high-performance, hi-tech car offering a more precise and finely-balanced experience than the more traditional, almost sledgehammer ways of the Arnage and Turbo R. And in terms of power-per-pound, you won't do much better than an early GT with a sensible mileage and a comprehensive history.

Mechanical and structural problems are only common on the most neglected examples, although you'll still want definitive proof of maintenance; if any repairs are needed to either the engine or transmission, they can quickly exceed the value of the car. Electrical issues are the GT's biggest gripe, with repairs again being expensive – and potentially difficult thanks to the car's sheer complexity. GTs that go unused for long periods are prone to problems, especially if the batteries are getting tired, so be wary of taking on one that has stood for some time. Also, check the left footwell for signs of water ingress and damp, as early Continentals had an issue with a void in the scuttle panel filling with water and damaging the ECUs and wiring sections within – something that can easily cost a five-figure sum to put right.

WHAT TO PAY

PROJECT: £10,000-£15,000

GOOD: £20,000-£30,000

EXCELLENT: £35,000-£50,000

NOW… AND THE FUTURE

We take a look at Bentley's achievements since the turn of the century, and reveal some of its innovative plans for the future

Bentley's progress throughout the early years of the 21st century has been remarkable, with the range expanding via new-generation models and limited-run specials, the latter with seven-figure price tags and bearing names like Bacalar. Under Volkswagen control since 1998, Bentley has transformed its line-up, as well as the historic Crewe plant that built its first Bentley way back in 1946.

VW's ownership of Bentley has seen the British brand go from strength to strength, with the initial focus being on further developing the new Arnage that the German giant inherited as part of the acquisition, as well as creating the first all-new Bentley of the 21st century: the hi-tech Continental GT coupé, which took a bow in 2003 and from which an open-top GTC version was developed.

Since then, there have been many more new launches, with the GT-based four-door Continental Flying Spur arriving in 2005 and the second-generation Azure the following year. A big new coupé going by the name of Brooklands took a bow in 2008, offering extra exclusivity thanks to a production total of just 550 units in three years. The long-running Arnage was replaced by the new Mulsanne in 2010, and the following year saw the debut of the second-generation Continental GT and GTC convertible. A second-gen Flying Spur was launched in 2013, and by 2018 another generation of GT and GTC was appearing.

Launched in 2016, the hugely successful Bentayga SUV is Bentley's bestselling vehicle globally.

One of the most important new Bentleys, however, was the Bentayga of 2016, which has since gone on to become the marque's bestseller. Launching a Bentley SUV was always going to be a controversial move, and it's true that many of the company's more traditional fans still don't approve; but there's no arguing with the commercial success of the Bentayga, which remains one of the finest ultra-luxury SUVs on today's market. Available in standard and extended-wheelbase guises, the Bentayga has evolved to now boast a hybrid powertrain, bridging the gap between pure petrol and all-electric models.

FUTURE PLANS

The Bentayga joins the latest Flying Spur and Continental GT in today's line-up, although expansion of the Bentley range is part of the company's »

The long-running Bentley Arnage was finally replaced by the svelte new Mulsanne in 2010.

The Flying Spur and GT models in their 2025 spec, updated and still highly competitive.

The Continental GT range is now in its fourth generation, launched in the summer of 2024.

> **"One of the most important new Bentleys was the Bentayga, which has since become the company's bestseller"**

exciting plans for the future. The end of 2024 saw Bentley announcing its new Beyond100+ business strategy, which included confirmation that it was delaying its transition into a manufacturer of only battery electric vehicles (BEVs). The strategy of the original Beyond100 plan of four years earlier was to go full-electric by 2030, but instead Bentley will now continue to develop its plug-in hybrid (PHEV) powertrains and won't be BEV-only until 2035.

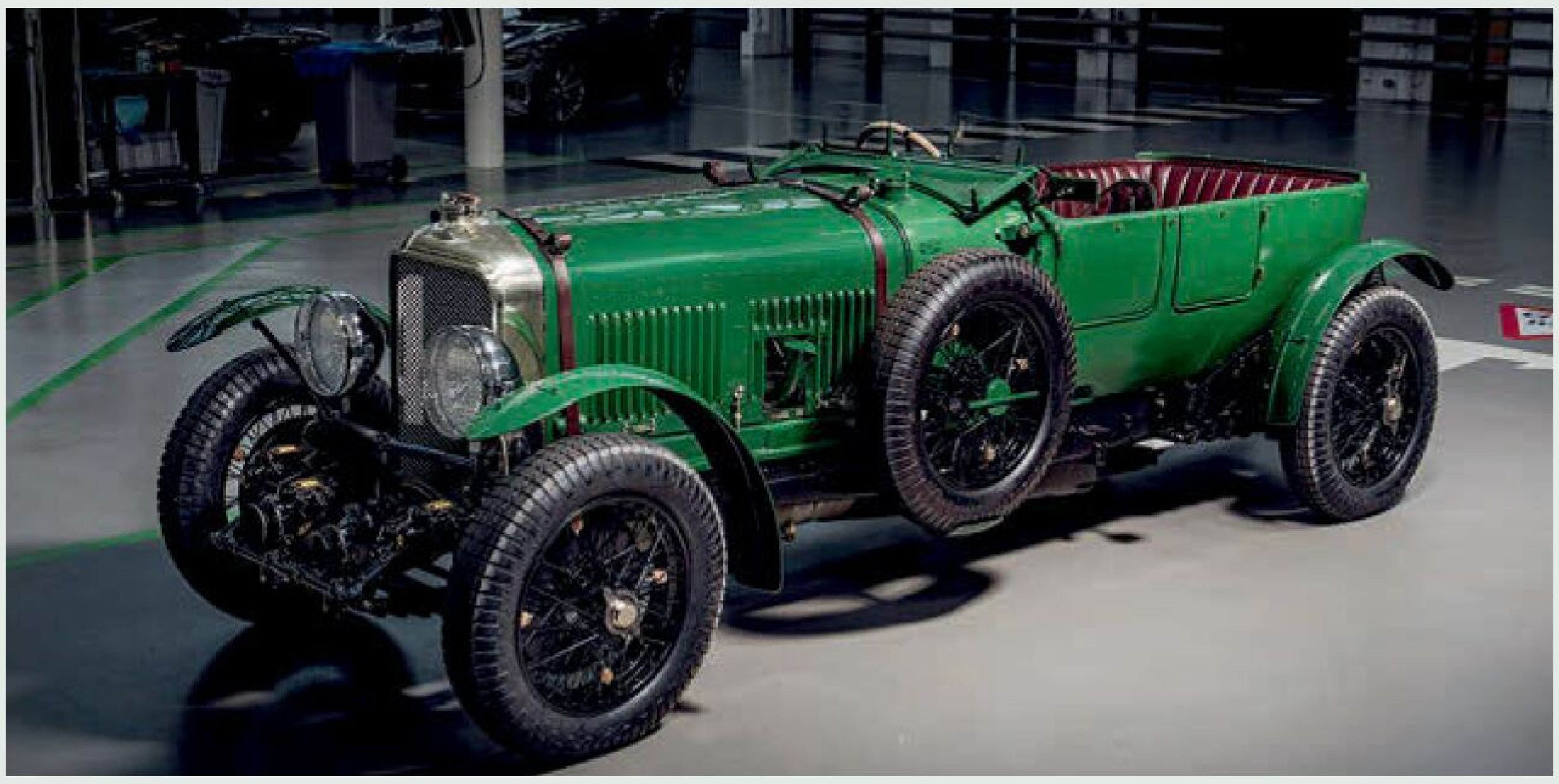
The company has also confirmed that the launch of its inaugural BEV has been pushed back from 2025 to 2026. It will be what Bentley is calling "the world's first luxury urban SUV" and will mark the start of a decade-long plan to launch a new BEV or PHEV model each year. Announcing the changes, Bentley's recently appointed CEO, Frank-Steffen Walliser, said the firm was adapting to "today's economic, market and legislative environment", calling the new strategy "a major transformative plan for tomorrow".

The Beyond100+ plan officially refers to an "ambition" to be building only BEV vehicles from 2035 onwards, with Bentley continuing with its line-up of PHEVs until then. Since the 2024 discontinuation of the long-running W12 engine, Bentley's production focus has been on PHEV powertrains featuring V8 engines.

Another of Bentley's priorities is to become an end-to-end carbon-

Fans of open-top high-performance cars are well catered for by the latest Continental GTC.

CONTINUATION SERIES



One of Bentley's most intriguing recent developments has been the launch of its two Continuation Series cars, kicking off with the 'Blower' of 2019 and continuing with the Speed Six more recently.

Just 12 examples of the Blower Continuation Series were built, each one an exact recreation of the legendary supercharged models that took Le Mans by storm. Each car was individually handcrafted by a specialist team from Bentley's Mulliner division, after Bentley's own 'Team Blower' – chassis number HB3403 – was disassembled to its individual components, with every part then catalogued and meticulously scanned in 3D to create a complete digital model of the entire car. Using the original 1920s moulds and tooling jigs, plus traditional hand tools alongside the latest manufacturing technology, 12 sets of parts could then be created before assembly.

The Speed Six Continuation Series follows the same technique, with the first customer car – featuring Parsons Napier Green bodywork on top of a black-painted chassis – being delivered to its new keeper at the start of 2025. Crafted by hand from scratch, each car takes eight months to complete, with Mulliner technicians working closely with a network of specialist suppliers across the UK to recreate every detail of the original Speed Six.

Over 600 individual new parts, including a new engine block casting, were fabricated for the 6½-litre race-spec engine, which at the time developed 200bhp. Dyno testing has shown the Speed Six Continuation Series engines to develop 205 bhp; and while higher outputs have been achievable with the aid of modern engineering materials, the aim of the Continuation Series team was to create a Bentley exactly as it would have looked and performed in 1930.

neutral organisation, with the target being driven by a transformation programme across its entire operations. Its Crewe plant has already become the UK's first carbon-neutral luxury car factory, certified by the Carbon Trust, following two decades of implementing innovative solutions, including a water recycling system in the paint shop, local tree planting, installation of a 10,000 solar panel carport (taking the total number of on-site solar panels to 30,000) and a switch to renewable-only electricity sources.

In addition, all Bentley suppliers have passed a sustainability audit, while by »

Flying Spur

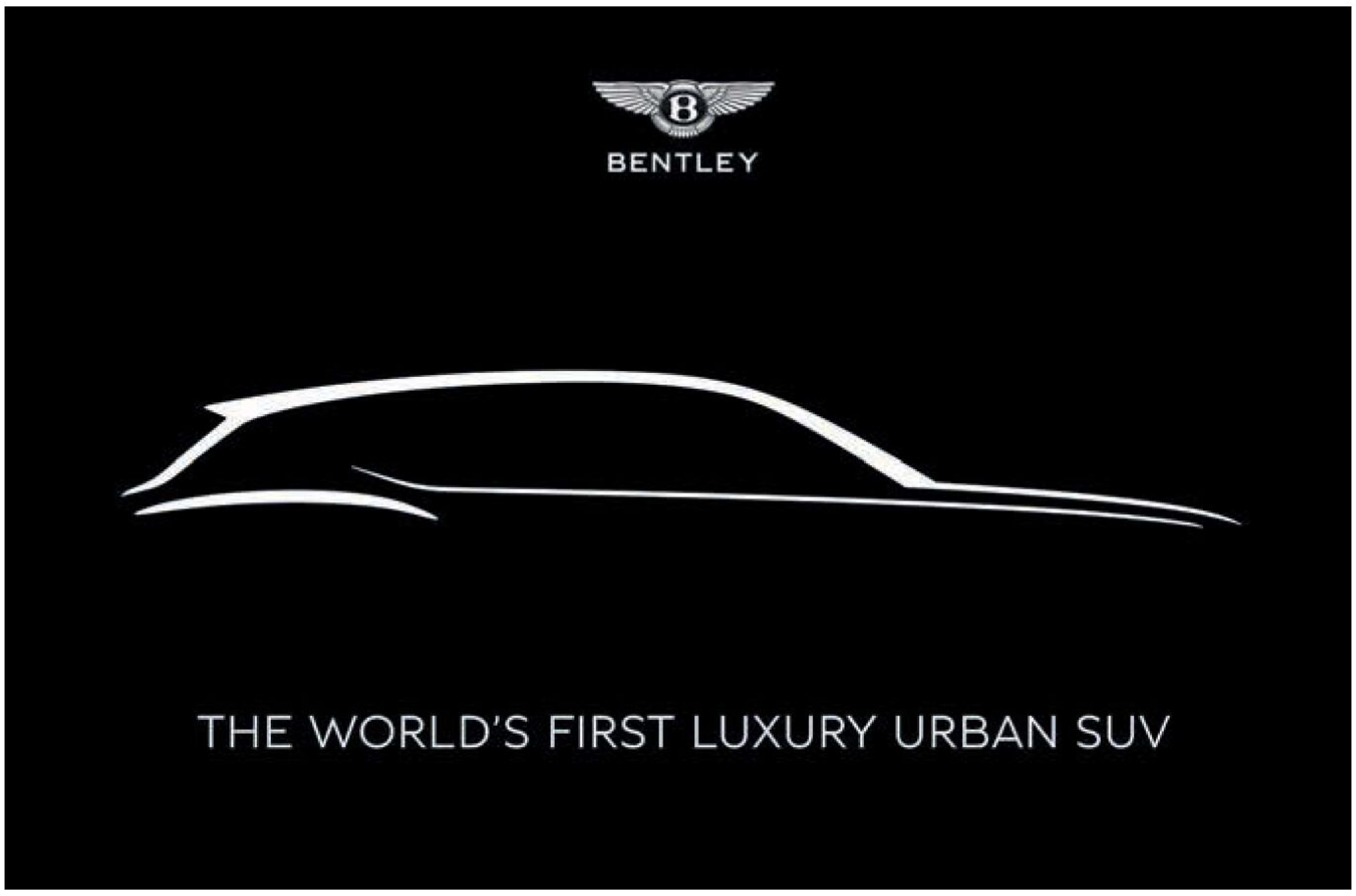
Launched in 2019, the third-generation Flying Spur is engineered to take a hybrid powertrain.

BEYOND100+
UFF 366

Bentley's Beyond100+ plan refers to an "ambition" to be building only BEV vehicles from 2035.

2026 the company intends to reduce its factory environmental impact by focusing on energy consumption, CO2 emissions, waste water, use of solvents in the paint process and becoming plastic neutral. The end result will be a climate-positive factory by 2030, actively reducing levels of carbon in the atmosphere.

Meanwhile, a teaser image of Bentley's 2026 BEV has been released, showing the car's roofline. Despite it looking like an entry into the SUV/crossover sector, Bentley insists that the newcomer – which is being designed and developed at Crewe – will create an "entirely new segment". At less than five metres in length, it will be Bentley's smallest model of the modern era and is expected to be aimed at city-based luxury car drivers.


BENTLEY
THE WORLD'S FIRST LUXURY URBAN SUV

A teaser image of Bentley's first fully electric vehicle – set for launch in 2026 – is shown here.

Walliser describes his company's first BEV as "definitely a milestone for Bentley". He also confirms that it will represent an extension of the current range: "It will not replace a car. It will be an additional car in our fleet, and it will be something really different to what we offer today."

The Beyond100+ business plan also includes what Bentley is calling a "fundamental reinvention" of the infrastructure at its historic Crewe plant, securing it as the company's base for "the next generation of products". The investment at Crewe will include a new design centre, paint shop and BEV assembly line.

No matter what challenges face the global motor industry now and into the future, there's no doubt that Bentley will continue to provide luxury car buyers with some of the finest models, with its reputation for quality, luxury and performance remaining intact. ■

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Some of the fleet at Marquis Suffolk, the luxury hotel, spa and wedding venue (www.marquissuffolk.com)

Pictured is the 1976 Rolls-Royce Phantom VI Landaulette; 1964 Bentley S3 Continental Drophead; 1965 Bentley S3 convertible

It was in 1919 that one of the most remarkable automotive stories began, when Walter Owen Bentley lent his name to his brand new company... marking the start of a technological and performance revolution. He was to build the cars that would take victory at Le Mans and achieve commercial success on the road, appealing to power-hungry wealthy motorists of the time.

Like any long-running tale, however, the history of Bentley is also peppered with disappointment and disaster. From being rescued from receivership by Rolls-Royce in 1931, Bentley went on to produce a series of sophisticated road cars before being diluted through long-term badge-engineering from the late 1950s. Another revolution lay ahead by the '80s, though, with turbocharging suddenly doing for Bentley what supercharging had achieved six decades earlier.

New generations of high-performance Bentley saloons and coupes appeared, giving the marque a higher profile and putting it back at the forefront of luxury performance. By the end of the 20th century, the company had a brand new owner and these days it's a marque that remains highly revered, producing some of the most sought after models in its sector.

In this 132-page publication, we chart the full history of Bentley and take a look at its future plans, as well as offering buying advice for an array of desirable post-war classics. We take an in-depth look at the most popular models, and we meet the owners of some stunning examples. It's a ride like no other.

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